ROUTLEDGE FOCUS

GYPSY FEMINISM

Intersectional Politics, Alliances, Gender and Queer Activism

Laura Corradi

ROUTLEDGE Focus

Gypsy Feminism is a very necessary and timely book. Investigating and reclaiming Gypsy and Roma histories and worlding practices within a framework of feminist, queer and decolonial critique, the volume takes intersectional politics and intersectional analysis to new and highly important fields of study, breaking radically with epistemologies of ignorance. A 'must' for everyone committed to feminist futures.

— Nina Lykke, Professor Emerita, Unit of Gender Studies, Linköping University, Sweden

An interesting and useful book not only for Roma women (and for women in general) but for the whole Romanès community. Corradi offers a detailed feminist and intersectional account of the literature, and explores a little known theme: the reality of LGBTIQ people in the Roma community, often hidden. This is a quality study, and is essential reading.

— Fiore Manzo, poet and activist (Fondazione Romani Italia – Delegazione Calabria)

This wide-ranging and provocative book makes a compelling case for the unique and generative epistemological contributions of a Gypsy feminist politics to anti-racist, intersectional, and decolonial feminist thought. Drawing on the historical and transnational specificity of the material lives and embodied identities of Romani, Sinti, and traveller communities, Corradi confronts racist, anti-Gypsy (romaphobia) rhetoric head on, illuminating the radical potential of coalition and solidarity among Roma gender activists from multiple geopolitical locations outside the boundaries of nation-states. An original contribution to critical studies of race and coloniality in Europe.

— Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Author of *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003), and Professor of Women's and Gender Studies, Syracuse University

A powerful analysis that fully explores the intersectionality of feminisim, queer activism, difference and diversity, decolonisation and social activism. Provocative and a must read for understanding the power of intersectional work. I recommend this book as one that will challenge current thinking while offering possibilities for thinking differently about difficult situations for women. I was taken by the breadth of analysis and scope of thinking presented by the author . . . a provocative read in many ways.

— Linda Tuhiwae Smith, professor of indigenous education at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand, author of *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

Laura Corradi's book, *Gypy Feminism: Intersectional Politics, Alliances, Gender and Queer Activism* is a scholarly testimony on the emerging intersectional Romani feminism. She researched, followed and eye-witnessed, as a non-Romani scholar, the development of radical political and academic agenda of Romani feminism. Moreover, she not just describes but also offers a technique to de-colonialize feminist theory through critical reflection on race, power, and privilege. This book provides an essential theoretical foundation for anyone interested in the fragmented perspectives and subversive nature of Romani gender and queer activism. This is a unique book that has been produced with a specific will to decolonize knowledge production.

— Angéla Kóczé, Assistant Professor of Romani Studies, Central European University, author of *Missing Intersectionality: Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Class in Current Research and Policies on Romani Women in Europe*

Breaking new grounds, this book, examines the complicated relationship of the Gypsies – one the most persecuted group of people in Europe – in relation to the state, racism, sexism and historical erasure. The scope of this book is important in creating new theoretical positions that challenge exclusionary practices.

— Margaret Abraham, Author of *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence Among South Asian Immigrants in the United States* and Professor, Hofstra University

This is an important book that takes to a world of struggle and resistance feminists so far have ignored and yet is highly inspiring.

— Silvia Federici, Professor Emerita and Teaching Fellow at Hofstra University, author of *Caliban and the Witch*

Gypsy Feminism

Clumsy stereotypes of the Romani and Traveller communities abound, not only culturally in programs such as *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings*, but also amongst educators, social workers, administrators, and the medical profession. Gypsy cultures are invariably presented as ruled by tradition and machismo. Women are presented as helpless victims, especially when it comes to gendered forms of violence. The reality, however, is much more complicated.

In *Gypsy Feminism*, Laura Corradi demonstrates how Romaphobia – racist and anti-Gypsy rhetoric and prejudice, pervading every level of society – has led to a situation where Romani communities face multiple forms of discrimination. In this context, the empowerment of women and girls becomes still more difficult: until recently, for example, women have largely remained silent about domestic violence in order to protect their communities, which are already under attack. Examining feminist research and action within Romani communities, Corradi demonstrates the importance of an intersectional approach in order to make visible the combination of racism and sexism that Gypsy women face every day.

This concise and authoritative book will appeal to scholars and students in the areas of Sociology, Cultural Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and Anthropology, as well as Politics, Media Studies, Social Policy, and Social Work. It is also an invaluable resource for activists, community and social service workers, and policymakers.

Laura Corradi is an eco-feminist and anti-racist activist. With a past as fugitive child, Traveller, and blue-collar worker–student, she earned her PhD from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She holds a researcher position at the University of Calabria, teaching gender studies and intersectional methodology.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-30033-0 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-203-73359-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

To all Gypsy, Roma, Traveller activists and to all feminists

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

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Preface

This study was born out of the urge to signal new social phenomena, which I believe have international relevance: gender activism and feminist struggles in the transnational Gypsy community.

Some sources still consider the word 'Gypsy' to be a derogatory term. Others, as we are going to see, reclaim the term 'Gypsy' despite its negative legacy, both in academic studies and in the activists' milieu. In my work, I will render it with a capital letter when used as a noun, e.g., 'a Gypsy was writing,' and all lower case as an adjective, e.g., 'a gypsy child was writing.' However, I will retain the capital letter or lower case when quoting books and articles, as per the authors' preferences. A terminological note is provided to give an idea of the debate around definitions and categories, as well as a brief historical excursus, which I found necessary for locating Gypsy feminism and gender activism within the framework of communities that have been oppressed for centuries but which are now experiencing newfound resilience, pride, and political action. The abundance of conditionals around historical and linguistic issues is intended to establish a safe space within the debate, especially regarding topics such as 'the origins' of Gypsies. In this work, I have striven to consider different theories as having equal dignity. Moreover, as a sociologist I do not feel that I have the background to make any judgments about different linguistic and historical interpretations.

Needless to say, this work is not exhaustive, for various reasons. For one thing, it is impossible to give a complete account of the many forms of gender agency and feminisms in multifaceted types of social relations, in part because of the non-territoriality of some ethnic and non-ethnic groups. In fact, as a result of different kinds of events, wars, and persecution, Gypsies dispersed around the world to some 66 different countries. Here I will be content if I can offer to the reader the outline of a possible path, without prefiguring a final destination. My interpretations may be wrong or incomplete from certain points of view, and also for objective reasons, such as limitations relating to the languages I have access to.

Since no knowledge is neutral, I should disclose my own particular standpoint. I find myself at the crossroads of several axes of difference. I have a background as a fugitive child who became a teenage blue-collar worker in Italy

in the mid-1970s, a time of great social transformation and political upheaval, when anti-capitalist and feminist movements found important merging points. I found a way to work in factories and complete my high school education in an industrial zone of northern Italy. It was these experiences that shaped my focus on the agency of vulnerable and underprivileged subjects while at university, during which time I supported myself as a part-time domestic childcare worker. With academic doors shut to me, and driven by a restless spirit, after graduation I headed overseas to further my studies in social sciences, with no regrets. I was awarded a scholarship to enter a doctoral program at the University of California, where I encountered *black and brown* cultures; later in Oakland, I encountered a community of Native American women and friendship started. A passion for writing, a restive attitude, and capacity for adaptation helped me to survive as a Traveller scholar living in a camper van until the age of 43, when I finally secured a tenure track position as a researcher in the deep south of Italy, just where I wanted to be. In the last 15 years, I have lived a sedentary life for a semester each year, teaching Gender Studies and Intersectional Methodology at the University of Calabria, while devoting the other time to traveling, conferences and lectures, action-research, and explorative studies, mostly in rural India, where I got in touch with Dalit and Adivasi cultures and ancient medical and agricultural wisdom.

This positioning of my personal perspective would not be complete without revealing something about my political views. With a Marxist background, I identify as an eco-feminist, anti-racist, and Queer activist, committed to radical social change. The right to health, clean air and water, organic community foods, participation in self-managed production, and direct democracy are my areas of interest. As a scholar, I focus on the intersectional critique of oppressive social relations as mutually constitutive, encouraging a bottom-up dismantling of white male science and authoritarian educational paradigms, which are dichotomous, hierarchical, and exclusionary – dangerous to both our health and nature. I also work towards the decolonization of knowledge in academia, with the creation of counter-hegemonic discourses and new epistemologies outside the university, accessible to anybody as a common good. Sources of inspiration are Mata Anandamritamayi's model of women's empowerment; the eco-feminism of Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva; the de-colonial methodologies of Linda Tuhiwae Smith; Kurdish feminism and *Jineology* in Rojava; as well as many examples of indigenous and aboriginal women's theories and struggles.

Another important element of my motivation and encouragement are my relationships with village women, whose personal strength and connection with the earth give me hope in sustainable futures, envisioning a world of freedom and equality in the face of all differences.

I hope that my attempts at focusing attention over two decades of gender activism and Gypsy feminisms will stimulate a reflection in the global feminist arena, in political and social sciences, and among activists and advocacy groups, as well as scholars committed to decolonizing research, theories, and

methodologies. My deepest desire is that this small book will be helpful in increasing awareness and connecting experiences, encouraging women in all communities to be protagonists of the narration of new her/stories. In terms of political distinctions, specific self-identification is of minor importance – some women identify as feminists and militate in feminist groups, others are feminist de facto, without any affiliation. Still other women are anti-racist activists, involved in gender issues only marginally, while expressing themselves as 'ethnic' representatives. All have great and powerful voices.

As is evident in my writing, English is my third language – Italian is my mother tongue and Spanish my second language. Hopefully, the imperfections in my writing style and narrative construction will not be disturbing to readers. I would also like to point out how the use of *English as Lingua Franca* (ELF) has a political meaning of inclusion for those like me who are non-native English writers. The contribution of peoples of different languages should be recognized as a factor for innovation: idioms are always evolving.

This publication represents only the first part of a larger project, which includes ongoing interviews with women community leaders, founders of associations, scholars, activists, and professionals. It is also designed to discover, by walking and asking, new paths where more friends and collaborators are found – who wish to share their ideas and experience in participatory research actions – in order to make the field study of gender activism and feminist agency more inclusive politically and geographically as well as in other ways.

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Acknowledgments

I want to express my thanks for the help I received from Gypsy and non-Gypsy friends, and from colleagues and activists who supported this work and pointed me to useful reading, revised the manuscript, or assisted its development in various ways. Among them, Fiore Manzo and his grandmother; Nazzareno Guarnieri for explanations during and after the Caravan; Giovanni Agresti, University of Teramo, for his advice about Romanes languages; Carmen Dell'Aversano, Director of 'Cirque' (Centro Inter-universitario Ricerca Queer) at the University of Pisa, for her comments; Oana Marcu for her suggestions; my former student and collaborator Cinzia Antonuccio for editing the bibliography; friends Lhoana Valentini, Fred Gardaphe, and Alice Pinto for their help; translator Edward Giorgilli for corrections and improvements to the manuscript; my colleague Ian Robinson, University of Calabria, for the final revision; and finally Routledge Editors Emily Briggs and Elena Chiu for their support, and for giving me the space I needed to express myself.

I want to acknowledge the important role played by groups, organizations, and international networks of activists and scholars (among which the Romani Studies Network http://romanistudies.eu/). Some of them, mostly English-language ones, are quoted in this work. They represent a small sample of the multitude of Gypsy experiences today in Europe. I want to thank all those who gave me permission to quote from their works beyond the 50 words permitted by the 'fair use' standard:

Sherrie Smith and Josie O'Driscoll for their articles on *Travellers' Times*;

Gallery 8 for their 'Body Politics' Expositions;

Margareta Matache, Harvard University, for her essays.

I thank the following institutions and journals for allowing me to quote their materials:

The European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network (ERGO);

The Central European University Press;

OSCE Gender Section;

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stifung Büro Budapest;

The Roma Youth Action Plan, Council of Europe for *Barabaripen*;

Analize – Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies;

European Roma Research Council, for permission to quote the Journal *Roma Rights*;

The Open Society Foundations for the article by Alexandra Oprea;

Petr Uhl and Gwendolyn Albert (from whom official permission to quote had not yet arrived) for the commentary published at:

www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/commentary-the-miss-roma-competition-does-more-harm-than-good

And all those, like Gaja Maestri, who published under Creative Commons. It was very useful.

A picture of the Gypsy Insurrection in Auschwitz-Birkenau – published by Sherrie Smith at http://travellerstimes.org.uk/Blogs--Features/May-16th-1944-the-day-of-Sinti-Romani-and-Roma-.aspx – was of great inspiration during the closure of this book. Thanks to all.

Terminological note: the politics of words

Definitions and categories are never neutral or innocent, and the word 'Gypsy' is no exception.[1] Actually, today the exonym[2] 'Gypsy' can be seen as a signifier with multiple connotations – it represents a *contended arena of meaning*. Since the 1400s, it has been used to label nomadic people in general: people with no fixed abode, caravan dwellers, and itinerant clans. Gypsies were considered child-robbers and burglars: the men portrayed as violent and rapists, women as prostitutes and unreliable mothers. 'Gypsy' was (and is even now) an insult, synonymous with vagabond, lazy, dirty, unable to work, unreliable, false, and cunning.

Gypsy still represents the radical Other. The definition has survived for centuries, and can be traced back in official documents, down to today, as we will show. The longevity of its permanence is an interesting phenomenon in itself.[3] Dik Van Arkel proposed a broad meaning for the people called Gypsies, to indicate all those who have an 'itinerant lifestyle.'[4] But many communities in recent times have become sedentary. Yet, such a change does not imply that they suddenly stop being Gypsies, in the same way that sedentary people do not become Gypsies when traveling. For this reason, the term Gypsy does not simply mean anyone who leads a nomadic life.

Scholars such as Ian Hancock criticized the use of the term Gypsy as a general designation, since it does not account for variance and disparities among different stigmatized peoples, which is true.[5] Several sources still consider the word 'Gypsy' or 'Tzigan' (Pirandă/ţigan or Tjigana/Tjigano in Romanian, Gitano/Gitana in Spanish, Zingaro/Zingara in Italian) to be a derogatory term.[6] Other sources, as we will see, employ the term 'Gypsy' despite its negative legacy. The term has been re-claimed among researchers and activists in different ethnic and non-ethnic groups, combining the understanding and valorization of internal differences with the awareness of living under the same type of oppression. In fact, Roma, Sinti, Manouche, Kalé, Yanish, Gitans, Camminanti, Gens du Voyage, and Travellers have all been called Gypsies; all have dealt with anti-Gypsyism and persecution throughout history. And in the present, all face common difficulties as inferiorized minorities. This is one of the reasons why I elected to use the term Gypsy in this work. No other term

functions so effectively as an umbrella definition. Another reason is political – to signify the crossroads of shared collective struggles as a common place to build alliances.

As Gaja Maestri's study on the Roma-squatters demonstrates, 'different naming strategies produce a plurality of effects that cannot be reduced to either inclusion or exclusion,' since labeling practices do not have predictable, clear-cut effects. In her work, two labeling patterns emerge. While the Council of Europe (CoE) draws clear distinctions between different terms,[7] the French and Italian tendency is to lump all different definitions together. While 'the naming practices of the CoE indeed counteract discriminatory national discourse,' Maestri notes that they 'can at the same time reinforce divisions' and social fragmentation.[8] On the other hand, the ambiguity of using all 'ethnic' and 'non-ethnic' definitions as synonyms can 'aggravate discriminatory policies but can also spur new creative practices of resistance.'[9] By blurring distinctions, the feeling of belonging to a common sphere is enhanced, and political cohesion and alliances may be rendered feasible.

At the institutional level, agencies tend to avoid the term 'Gypsy.' Since 2005, the European Commission has not used the word in official documents. As Katrin Simhandl discovered, it was during the process of the European enlargement that a divide occurred; the political discourse around Western Gypsies and Travellers became marginalized, while discussions about the situation of Roma in Eastern countries gained attention. The designation Gypsy was used 'as a bridge' between the two until a dividing political line was drawn, whereby Western Gypsies and Travellers were separated from Eastern Roma in institutional discourse and practice.[10] Such a choice recalls the *dividi et impera* strategy of separating and ruling groups that could potentially unite, using segregation devices for purposes of social control.

Simhandl points out how boundaries drawn around human beings turn them into *political objects*. Gypsies and Travellers were left aside as 'non-ethnic groups,' while the Roma underwent categorization as a 'minority' to be respected and protected. The labeling of a social group as minority is not above suspicion. The term has the same origin of minus, *minor*, and so recalls the idea of small, insignificant, negligible, or inferior; it can be seen as belonging to a dominant cognitive frame that diminishes those who are the object of the defining practice. Calling each group of people of color 'a minority' does not account for the fact that Whites in the world are *the minority* compared to people of color, who should start considering themselves, as African American scholar Angela Davis suggested, an *emerging majority*.

The Strasburg Declaration in 2010 opted for ethnic identifications such as 'Roma' or 'Sinti,' and most member states adopted the same policy. In Italy, the National Office Against Racism[11] forbids the use of the term 'Gypsies,' unaware that communities and research groups are attempting to enact a semantic re-appropriation of the word. In doing so, the institution gives a sign of externality to the ongoing processes of re-signification of the term. On the other hand, we can witness a negative backlash in the use of the word 'Gypsy' as an

offensive epithet by right-wing and racist political groups. A blatant case of *state racism*[12] should be mentioned here. The Romanian government decided to bar the use of terms such as 'the Roma' or 'roma people'; they should only be referred to as 'Gypsies,' so as not to be mistaken for Romanians. While the Italian pressure to avoid the term 'Gypsy' can look shortsighted – too zealous or 'wannabe politically correct' – the measures taken by the Romanian government (incredibly, approved by their Senate Committee for Human Rights) is an openly racist policy aimed at forbidding an ethnic group – the Roma – the use of its own name.[13]

The main weakness of the term 'Gypsy' resides in the fact it represents the output of a process of *othering*.[14] The definition was chosen by sedentary populations to indicate nomadic ones, seen as strangers. The etymology of 'Gypsy' does not necessarily imply a derogatory meaning in itself, as it may refer to a place of supposed origin, whereas the word 'Gitanas/Gitanos' seems to derive from the old Greek 'Asthiganos,' which is possibly a term of Indo-European origin that means 'untouchable' – a term extended to all foreigners, nomads, and tribals and a cultural residual of the negative way in which outcast people were represented in India in the past. Through the last century the label 'untouchable' was replaced with the self-descriptive expression 'Dalit' (literally meaning 'Oppressed on the Earth'); while the so-called 'Tribals' (indigenous populations) re-named themselves as 'Adivasi.' According to Hindologist Maria Angelillo, 'communities formerly classified as 'Criminal Tribes' in the British colonial taxonomy, later became *Scheduled Castes* and *Scheduled Tribes.* Significantly, the legal definition of Scheduled Castes often corresponds to the contemporary attribution of the term Gypsy'; such identification today includes a large number of communities, among which Angelillo mentions the Kalbelia, Banjara, Gadulya, Lohar, Nat, Dom, Meos, Gandhila, Kikan, and Bawari.[15] The commonalities between Dalit and Roma/Gypsy conditions are very evident and recently became object of a study.[16]

In this essay, I will refer to Roma women as 'Romani' (or Romnì, or Romniya) as per quoted literature; I also refer to Sinti women and other ethnic determinations when it is explicit; or just to 'Gypsy women' when no ethnic group is mentioned. In the same way, I refer to 'Romani feminism' or 'Gypsy feminism' according to different authors. I am aware of the ambiguous circumstances in which words are contended objects in terms of meaning – and how politically they work as powerful signifiers. Yaron Matras speaks about a *double signifier*, drawing from Dipesh Chakrabarty's theory of History 1 and History 2,[17] in which History 1 is the history of the imperial Europe, modern capital, and those who have power, and History 2 is made up of the many histories of the subaltern, the colonized, and the poor. Matras equates 'Gypsy 1' with the social phenomenon of itinerant communities, where no attention is given to their origin, allowing for the inclusion of non-ethnic groups (such as the Irish Travellers or the Camminanti in Sicily); and 'Gypsy 2' with naming practices that demonstrate the Indian origins of Romanes, representing the Gypsies' ancestors as Kshatrijas (warrior caste) instead of Sudra (lower

caste).[18] Yet, there is a difference. Whereas History 1 and History 2 are antagonistic, both the perspectives defined as Gypsy 1 and Gypsy 2 may include what we can define as a *counter-hegemonic*[19] interpretation.

While the capacity to define has always been a prerogative of those in power, re-defining has become a subversive activity worthy of reflection. The decision to employ 'Gypsy Feminism' as the title of this work can be also be seen as an expression of faith in the potential for re-signification as an ongoing political act. The production of counter-definitions may happen through a *semiotic inversion of the despotic signifiers*,[20] as was the case in the past with words such as 'Freak,' 'Fag,' 'Dyke,' and the most successful of all, 'Queer.'[21] The faculty of re-appropriating terms, even insults, enables discursive practices of re-signification – a crucial terrain of agency and symbolic warfare – meant to reduce the normative power of stereotypes. By deconstructing and disassembling despotic signifiers, oppressive and offensive words and images, the subalterns give birth to a process of neutralizing external domination and control over the language.[22]

Community self-defense, against anyone who has the power to define and exert supremacy and control, is combined with demarcation customs and redefinitions of the external world. Designating non-Gypsy persons as Gadje (also Gadze, Gagè, or Gorgios) is a consolidated naming practice that should be recognized as a form of agency and jurisdiction over language. This practice is important in terms of building semiotic counter-power within the community and in relations with multiple outside agencies of varying degrees of proximity.

A definition such as 'Roma' is often misunderstood either as describing all Gypsies, or identifying a single homogenous people, when in fact the term Roma currently indicates several ethnic groups and includes different religious communities – Muslim and Christian (of various types, from Orthodox to Pentecostal, from Baptists to Catholics). The Roma, Sinti, Kalé, Manousches, and Romanichels share common linguistic roots, yet spoken Romanes varies considerably from state to state and even within the same nation.[23] Romanes is one of the languages at risk of being lost. It cannot be chosen yet as a second language in European school systems. Gypsy youth tend to speak and write the local idiom – Spanish, Greek, Italian, or French, depending upon the community they are in – without an opportunity to develop their native tongue in wider society; this puts them at risk of becoming linguistically assimilated. In the UK and Ireland, the most spoken language among Gypsies and Travellers is English. Political preferences also vary widely from place to place. Perhaps the main divergences are between nationalists, such as the *Zentralrat Deutscher Sint und Roma*,[24] and transnationalists, like the *Roma and Sinti Union*, now renamed *Romani National Congress*.[25] Both concepts of 'non-territorial nation' and 'transnational minorities' are subject to scrutiny from a de-colonial perspective, making the very idea of nation quite problematic. Looking at the future, some convergence on common goals seems likely. One main political commonality of different ethnic and non-ethnic groups throughout Europe is a unified determination to oppose anti-Gypsyism in all its forms (Romaphobia,

xenophobia, Tziganofobìa), and to develop larger alliances against racist and right-wing attacks and neoliberal governmental policies.[26]

Notes

1 Foucault named classificatory systems 'taxonomies', with each of them being a cultural code of interpretation and the product of power relations. Foucault, Michel (1970), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Pantheon Books, New York.
2 An 'exonym' is a term by which others name a people or a group.
3 Bontempelli looks at how different theories of origins affect modern images of Gypsies: on the professional plane, they are represented as itinerant craftsmen and merchants; on the social level, they overlap with the marginal world of homeless people and bohemians; on the ethnic side, Gypsies are seen as having common lines of ancestors; while in terms of the religious aspect they have been considered as sects or wandering pilgrims in eternal penance. Francois De Vaux de Foletier narrates how they converted to Christianity from paganism – then fell into idolatry and are still atoning for their sin. De Vaux de Foletier, François (1983), *Le monde des Tsiganes*, Berger-Levrault, Paris.
4 Lucassen, Leo, Willems, Wim and Cottaar, Annemarie (1998), *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups*, Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom.
5 Hancock, Ian (1987), *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of Gypsy Slavery and Persecution*, Karoma Publisher, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Hancock, Ian (1999), 'The Roma: Myth and Reality'. www.reocities.com/~patrin/mythandreality.htm; Hancock, Ian (2002), *We are the Romani people: Ame sam e rromane džene*, Centre de recherches tsiganes, University of Hertfordshire Press, Hatfield Hertfordshire.
6 Matache, Margareta (2017), 'Dear Gadje (non-Romani) Scholars. . .' Available from: www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/5943f4c9e4b0d188d027fdb2
7 Council of Europe (2012), 'Descriptive Glossary of Terms Relating to Roma Issues' file:///G:/Glossary%20Roma%20EN%20version%2018%20May%202012%20(1).pdf
8 Maestri, Gaja (2016), 'Are They Nomads, Travellers or Roma? An Analysis of the Multiple Effect of Naming Assemblages', *Area*, Durham University, Durham, p. 4.
9 Ibid.
10 Simhandl, Katrin (2006), 'Western Gypsies and Travellers-Eastern Roma: The Creation of Political Objects by the Institution of the European Union', *Nation and Nationalism*, Vol. 12, N° 1, pp. 97–115; Simhandl, Katrin (2009), 'Beyond Boundaries? Comparing the Construction of the Political Categories "Gypsies" and "Roma" Before and After EU Enlargement', in, *Romani Politics in Contemporary Europe: Poverty, Ethnic Mobilization, and the Neoliberal Order*, ed. by Sigona Nando and Trehan Nidhi, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 72–93.
11 Unar (Ufficio Nazionale Anti-Razzismo) was instituted in 2003 by the Italian Government in the Equal Opportunities Department. On July 12, 2016, Unar was the target of an official rebuke by a Strasbourg body expressing concern at the noticeable increase of xenophobia and anti-Gypsyism in Italy and the widespread and commonplace use of discriminatory, intolerant, and racist language in political discourse and media outlets. The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities describes UNAR as weak; subordinated to the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers; and devoid of power beyond persuasion and moral authority: 'It is deeply regrettable that UNAR cannot bring legal proceedings in discrimination

cases and its intervention is limited to amicus curiae briefs.' www.errc.org/blog/dosta-basta-italia-yet-another-official-rebuke-for-roma-rights-abuses/120

12 Basso, Pietro, ed. (2010), *Razzismo di Stato. Stati Uniti, Europa, Italia*, Franco Angeli, Milano; Corradi, Laura (2012), 'State Racism and Popular Feelings', *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 20, N° 4, pp. 226–239.

13 The word Roma (or Rrom or Dom) means 'man' or 'human being.'

14 'Othering' is a process in which a group is defined as 'other' by a dominant group – often through the use of inferiorizing terms or metaphors. Minh-ha, T. Trinh (1989), *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Post-Coloniality and Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

15 Angelillo, Maria (2012), 'Censire l'esistente per creare il reale. L'origine Indiana e la costruzione dei "rrom"', *Altre modernità/Otras modernidades/Autres modernités/Other modernities*, N° 8, Università di Milano, p. 158. See also Acton, Thomas, ed. (2001), *The Emergence of Romani as a koïné Outside of India*: *Scholarship & the Gypsy Struggle*, University of Hertfordshire Press, Hatfield Hertfordshire.

16 Dunajeva, Jekatyerina and others (2017), 'The Roma and the Subaltern Communities of India', *European Roma Rights Centre*. Available from: www.errc.org/-blog/the-roma-and-the-subaltern-communities-of-india/177

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18 Matras, Yaron (2004), 'The Role of Language in Mystifying and De-Mystifying Gypsy Identity', in *The Role of the Romanies*, ed. by Saul Nicholas and Tebbutt Susan, Liverpool University Press; Matras, Yaron (2014), *I Met Lucky People: The Story of the Romani Gypsies*, Penguin Books, London.

19 Keim, Wiebke (2011), 'Counter-Hegemonic Currents and Internationalization of Sociology: Theoretical Reflections and an Empirical Example', *International Sociology*, Vol. 26, N° 1, pp. 123–145.

20 Corradi, Laura and others (2012), *Specchio delle sue brame. Analisi socio-politica delle pubblicità: genere, classe razza, età ed eterosessismo*, Ediesse, Roma. Signifiers can be words or images – there is no necessary nor natural direct connection with the signified – signs are always marked by arbitrariness. Despotic signifiers arise from authoritarian powers having normative ability over desire, identity, and behaviors. The original idea comes from Deleuze and Guattari (1983), who were inspired by Lacan's concept of 'master signifier.' Cf. Corradi, Laura (1992), 'Lacan and the Subversion of the Subject. A Sociological Reading', *Sociological Theory Field Statements*, University of California, Santa Cruz.

21 As in the seminal paper by De Lauretis, Teresa (1991), 'Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities', special issue of *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*; and in several works by Butler, Judith (1993), *Bodies That Matter*, Routledge, New York, http://eng5010.pbworks.com/f/ButlerBodiesThatMatterEx.pdf; Butler, Judith (1997), *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection,* Stanford University Press, Redwood City; Butler, Judith (2002), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* Routledge, New York; see also Dell'Aversano, Carmen (2012), 'Orizzonti di sviluppo della ricerca queer', in *Inquietudini Queer*. *Desiderio, Performance, Scrittura*, ed. by Chemotti Saveria and Susanetti Davide, Il Poligrafo, Padova, pp. 221–250.

22 Corradi, Laura and others (2012); Bogdán, Mária (2015), 'Challenging Perspectives – The Role of Media Representation in Knowledge Production about Roma', *Roma Rights: Journal of the European Roma Right Center*, N° 2, Budapest, pp. 71–75. See also https://Gypsyrepresent.wordpress.com/ – a website for 'Thinking critically about Romani representations in pop culture.'

23 As an example, in Italy there are 20 regional communities, 110 provincial communities, and 8,400 municipal communities; each region has its own dialect. The same is true for the numerous Romanes communities, each of which has sub-groups; different Romanes dialects may overlap, from 40–50% to 80–90%, according to Roma teacher Nazzareno Guarnieri (personal communication). On the topic see: Agresti, Giovanni (2015), *Le rappresentazioni sociali del romanés Un'inchiesta sulla lingua dei rom e dei sinti in Italia*, with Fondazione Romanì Italia, Associazione LEM-Italia, Università degli Studi di Teramo, with Preface by Luciano D'Amico e Gianni Melilla, Postfazione by Pierfranco Bruni, Aracne Editrice, Roma. The language commonalities seem to be based in shared Sanskrit roots: as reported by Ian Hancock, 'If I want to speak in Romani to a speaker of a dialect different from my own, it is the European words we must each avoid, not the Indian ones.' Hancock, Ian (1997), 'The Struggle for the Control of Identity', *Transitions*, Vol. 4, N° 4.

24 http://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/

25 Turrini, Mauro, 'Tra stigma e riappropriazione la questione dell'origine dei "zingari e dei "rom" ', *Zapruder*, N° 19, pp. 8–25.

26 About the 'Alliance Against Anti-Gypsyism' between Roma, Sinti and Travellers, see www.ergonetwork.org/ergo-network/news/207/000000/Alliance-against-AntiGypsyism-launches/

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Historical note: women, families, and communities from Porrajmos to anti-Gypsyism

Gypsy women find themselves at the crossroads of racism, sexism, and (often extreme) poverty. This is due to historical and social reasons. In this section, I will briefly outline some events, without which it would be difficult for the Gadje (non-Gypsy) reader to understand specific forms of gender struggles, the nuances of a profound patriarchy that has resisted social change, and different forms of persecution suffered by the communities throughout history. Gypsy women in particular have been the object of social stigma,[1] seen as malignant entities and sorcerers able to steal men's hearts and babies from the cradle.

As scholar–activist Sergio Bontempelli recalls, the dishonor of being considered child-robbers hit Gypsy women most of all, despite its falsity having been proven. In Venice in 1544, when the bloody ban against Gypsies was issued, *La Zingana*, by Gigio Artemio Giancarli, was performed in the theatre. In it, a young girl (Arab-speaking and Muslim-looking) kidnapped a baby from its cot, replacing it with her own – a strange behavior indeed, for a mother. The myth was reinforced by Cervantes in *La Gitanilla*. In the 1600s, Federico Borromeo openly accused the Gypsy communities of stealing Christian children, as stated by Juan de Quiñones in Spain in 1631 in an infamous pamphlet. During the same century, the 'wandering Jews' were also accused of abducting little Christians to kill them and drink their blood in rituals. The monstrification of *the Other*, as dark-skinned, nomad, sexually diverse, queer, brutal, barbarian, less than human – Gypsies or Jews, Homosexuals or Muslims – started in the Middle Ages and reached its peak during the time of the Inquisition. Today, the naming practices of those days still provide an arsenal of stereotypes ready to be re-activated during racist crusades, from Gypsyphobia to anti-Semitism, from homophobic to Islamophobic campaigns.

In Europe, Roma people officially constitute the largest ethnic 'minority.' There are an estimated 12 million Roma worldwide, of similar languages and traditions. Roma are part of the most marginalized segment of the population, commonly defined as 'Gypsies'; Gypsies are probably underestimated to amount to around 20 million people spread across 66 countries all over the world. More than 10 million are in Europe, excluding the Gypsies of Russia (some estimate these to be around one million) and the Gypsies of Turkey, which may amount to 5 million, as in a study sponsored by Osce and carried

out by Claude Cahn and Elspeth Guild.[2] Gypsies are still referred to as Dom[3] in countries of the Middle East, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, and Syria, from which locations they are migrating to escape civil war.[4]

Europe's Gypsies, Gitans, Gents du Voiage, and Camminanti live in Mediterranean states such as Spain, Greece, France, and Italy; Travellers dwell in the United Kingdom and Ireland; and eastern countries such as Hungary, Albania, and Balkan states such as Romania and Bulgaria are home to the majority of Roma people. More than a million Gypsies live in the US and Canada; around 800,000 in Brazil;[5] and we can even find small communities of Gypsies in other non-European countries. As an example, around 20,000 Gypsies live in Australia, where there are clans of the English Roma, the Kalderash, and other groups from Eastern Europe. The small communities of Roma and Sinti in Australia have a joint organization that is culturally active in Queensland and in major cities.[6]

The Romani are an ancient group of peoples whose origins are surrounded by several legends and theories. They are said to derive from tribes from Anatolia, Arians from Punjab, pilgrims from Egypt, nomads from Arab countries, Ethiopia and Madagascar – the myriad of stories and different explanations are a fascinating phenomenon. At times, the mythology of their origins leaves space for orientalization[7] around the notion of 'true Gypsy' or 'authentic Roma': exotifying discourses, particularly those concerning women. In the literature, two tendencies have found expression. One is geared to racialization or ethnification, aimed at the construction of a 'national' type or subject to the exclusion of those considered to be *other*. Another line of interpretation, in contrast to the ideal of an original purity of blood or tradition, is oriented toward an interpretation in terms of *metissage* and solidarity among differently excluded and inferiorized experiences. These two kinds of discourse have different political profiles and distinct implications in terms of European policy – one claiming the status of nation and ethnic integrity, the other facing the challenge of diversity and alliances.

According to some historians and philologists, migrations of Gypsies started in India, with the Romanes language deriving from Sanskrit, as are many European idioms. Similar traditions and material culture, e.g., clothes and ornaments, can still be found in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, in the northwest, and in Maharastra and several other parts of the subcontinent. Even though the theory of Indian origins seemed to 'dignify' the Gypsies, most of this kind of early literature was overtly racist. Heinrich Grellman depicted Roma as a 'race of idlers, cheats and thieves.'[8] Margareta Matache of Harvard University, in her essay 'Word, Image and Thought: Creating the Romani Other,' recalls how early Gypsy studies, or Gypsology, reinforced stereotypes about itinerant populations represented as naturally inferior and subordinate. In parallel, such a process contributed to shaping a

> Euro-specific form of whiteness, or what we could call Gadje-ness, itself built in opposition to Roma. Authors such as Spellman in the early 1600s

> described Gypsies as 'the worst kind of wanderers and impostors . . . sunburnt, filthy in their clothing, and indecent in all their customs'. Watts De Peyster in 1887 expressed a similar thought: '[b]ut now-a-days it is only too well known that these Gypsies [sic] are nothing else than a congregated troop of bad characters, who have no willingness to work, but choose to make a profession of idleness, stealing, fornication, gluttony, drunkenness, gambling and the like'.[9]

Other scholars, among them Judith Okely, support the hypotheses of an endogenous, European origin, which seems to be sustained by geneticists. In her perspective, Gypsies are represented as the descendants of various native nomadic tribes, a symbol of *metissage* and hybridization of different peoples and cultures.[10] For Okely, Europe would have 'produced' Roma and other itinerant ethnic groups at different times in history – a social-constructionist standpoint, which contrasts with essentializing explanations and political practices.[11] I believe that from a post-colonial and non-dichotomous approach, both theories have explanatory validity in a combined form, i.e., centuries of migration waves from different regions of the Indian subcontinent toward the west have most likely merged with itinerant communities throughout European land as well as with local populations. At different points in history, these wandering groups may have joined together with people whose land was expropriated in a proto-industrial process, with those who resisted the factory discipline becoming unauthorized travelers. In England, wandering became illegal during the first phase of capitalism, through the sixteenth century.[12] Karl Marx, in *Das Kapital*, writes about the criminalization of itinerant people and the bloody legislation against those who did not have a fixed abode. The process of capitalistic 'primitive accumulation' needed a totalitarian adhesion to a way of life made of long days as a salaried worker and a coercive sedentary attitude. Those who did not conform – beggars, healers, heretic monks, marginals, and vagrants – could be legally captured by anybody on their way, appropriated, and reduced to slavery.[13]

Gypsies appear in the newspapers of 600 years ago as 'queer groups of pilgrims' or 'bands of gitans' (*cingani* in some documents); they were noticed in 1416 in Transylvania, a year later in Hungary and Germany, and between 1418 and 1422 in Switzerland, then in France and Italy. In 1427, they reached Paris.[14] The first anti-Gypsy legislation was issued in Moravia of 1538. In the same century, the British crown also produced a set of anti-Egyptian laws that expelled or killed 'Egyptians,' also known as 'Gypsies.' For several centuries, Gypsies were persecuted, hanged, or burned in Europe, often after being sentenced by the Catholic tribunals of the Inquisition, especially in countries such as Italy and Spain. Gypsies became slaves in the Balkans, and were enchained with Africans and Native Americans as slave workers in British colonies overseas.[15]

The peak of this persecution was reached in the twentieth century, when *Barò Porrajmos* (literally 'the Great Devouring') took place. *Porrajmos* indicates a combination of the ethnocidal attitudes and genocidal goals.[16] Gypsies

suffered under Nazi fascism. During World War 2, half a million Roma, Sinti, and other Gypsies were officially exterminated in concentration camps, and even more were killed during persecution. Overall, almost three-quarters of the Romani population was murdered in the Nazi fascist era.[17] The Romanes language was forbidden in Spain during fascism, and all Gypsy people were subjected to systematic discrimination throughout Europe. A long-due institutional recognition took place in 2005, when a United Nations resolution was passed to commemorate *all* Holocaust victims on January 27. On this date, those killed during *Porrajmos* are remembered and honored by all communities. On the activists' side, the anniversary of the Gypsy Insurrection at Auschwitz-Birkenau is also celebrated on May 16.

> During that evening in 1944, over 6,000 Roma and Sinti stood up to the Nazi SS and delayed the liquidation of the 'Gypsy camp' (Zigeunlager) by fighting off the soldiers sent to take them to the gas chambers. The concentration camp prisoners had received a tip-off and so mobilized and united together, making crude weapons from whatever they could get. In fact, Roma often resisted the Nazis by fighting back in whatever small ways they could, sometimes by singing, and many gave their lives believing it was better to die free than live as slaves to the Nazi regime. This should make us proud and give us hope, and those are the sentiments that this anniversary will bring forth. Sorrow, pride and resistance in the face of adversity, and hope for a better future.[18]

While little recognition is given to the *Porrajmos* – and even less attention is attributed to episodes of Gypsies' Resistance – neo-fascist and state violence is suffered to this day, as well as murder, forced expulsion, and sterilization, throughout Europe and beyond.[19] Attempts to erase memories can be seen as the continuation of ethnocidal attitudes and policies, and play an important part in the invisibilization of the history and political agency of Gypsies. Even when institutions make some inclusive attempts toward recognizing *all* Holocaust victims and memories, the usual lack of respect and consideration toward Gypsies shows up in the absence of participatory practices, as happened in the following example.

> The U.K. Holocaust commission was formed last year by the Conservative Government and it does not have a single Gypsy or Roma member. (. . .) The purpose of this commission is to ensure that the memories are kept alive, yet there is no recorded testimony of any Gypsy holocaust survivors, no plans as to how the Roma and Sinti will be acknowledged in the new £15 Million Imperial War Museum wing due to be built for the Holocaust Exhibition. There is also no specific inclusion of Roma or Sinti on the memorial to be built in Victoria Tower Gardens next door to Parliament. Not even an official ceremony for remembrance of the Gypsies and Roma murdered just for their race.[20]

After the fall of the Berlin wall, considered an inhuman construction by the Roma and Sinti people, whose families were kept separated by it, a new phase of political agency and civil commitment became practicable. Before entering the field of patriarchal traditions and feminist research, it is useful to have more background to understand how women are often both the breadwinners and primary caregivers in contemporary Roma families.[21]

Far from the romantic idea of the 'happy Gypsy,' beautiful and seductive, who freely wanders around the world, women's lives are difficult because of the widespread racism and prejudice surrounding Roma and Travellers' cultures. Women are objects of harassment and suffer multiple forms of discrimination, located as they are at the crossroads of class, gender, race, and other inequalities; these have been studied with an intersectional approach. After carrying out research in France, Italy, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia, Amnesty International highlighted the human rights violations experienced by Romani women as a result of discrimination due to their ethnicity as well as their gender. The findings draw attention to the conditions of Romani women living in camps, in terms of health, work, risk of violence, and the impact of forced evictions in their lives and families. Even after resettlement, they are often found to inhabit inadequate housing, lacking essential services such as water, sanitation, heating, and electricity. This especially impacts women because of their domestic responsibilities. Sometimes, under great psychological stress, women refuse settlement so as not to be separated from the rest of the family; as happens in France and Italy, accommodations after evictions are often offered only to women and their children and not to husband and adult sons, resulting in the break-up of families. The Amnesty International report stresses that the lack of a legal place of residence has negative outcomes in many aspects of women's lives.[22]

In Europe, we witness widespread phenomena in terms of Romaphobia and Tziganofobìa. These are racist social attitudes, understood today as *anti-Gypsyism*. We should look at the causes. Institutional policies of keeping Gypsies apart from the rest of the population (besides being itself a problem when talking about 'integration' or 'inclusion') imply several social problems. In fact, segregated housing presents multiple criticalities for health and education.[23] Often the places chosen for relocating Gypsies are in degraded areas, near garbage dumps or industrial areas, and poorly connected with public transportations, making it more difficult to access health care, services, school, and work. Relocated Gypsies often have to confront unfriendliness and even resentment from host communities, who already feel tense about living in deprived and hazardous environments and experience the relocation (or what they see as 'invasion') of other unfortunate families as unwelcome.

European research indicates that twice as many people are prejudiced against ethnic groups than against homosexuals, and that the rate is four times higher than that of prejudice against disabled people.[24] Romaphobia and Tziganofobìa are increasing in Europe, and the goals of the Decade for Roma

Inclusion (2005–2015) seem far away.[25] The European Commission does not even include anti-Gypsyism and Romaphobia alongside anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as part of its human rights policies.[26]

The phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism has received media attention because of the burning of camps, at times after neo-fascist and xenophobic attacks instigated by politicians.[27] Such assaults are sometimes organized with the involvement of lower-class neighboring inhabitants distressed by the degraded conditions of camps, which institutions often leave in conditions that constitute public health hazards. Racist and fascist party activists often prod such vulnerable residents of urban fringes into scapegoating Gypsies after robberies or acts of sexual violence.

Gypsy settlements are still improperly named 'Nomad Camps,' despite the sedentary trend displayed in urban contexts over the last few decades. As the European Roma Rights Center comments in a very forthright condemnation of institutional and popular racism, the continued use of the term 'nomads' in public and official discourse is 'perpetuating an outdated and discriminatory reference, which has little to do with reality today.' The designation 'nomad' has served too long and too effectively as justification for 'settling' these communities in segregated camps; forcing them to live apart from society in often deplorable conditions; and, according to the report, 'shifting the blame for poverty, hostility and systematic discrimination on the shoulders of Roma and ultimately maintaining the inertia of the status quo.'[28] For those who live in Gypsy settlements, everyday life is often miserable, in precarious huts, with no running water, no electricity, and no sewage; this explains the level of illnesses related to hygiene, cold weather, humidity, and malnutrition, as reported by volunteer associations and official publications.[29] So called 'Nomad Camps' in the Italian context have been effectively described as a system of state inefficiencies and corruption where practices of resistance take place.[30]

Given the seclusion and the poor conditions in which Gypsy communities are kept, a general climate of state racism,[31] and ongoing media misrepresentations of Gypsy cultures, it is not surprising how social scapegoating of Gypsies gave birth to pernicious forms of Tziganofobìa and Romaphobic discourse from politicians all across Europe. These have included violent attacks in many cities, including demonstrations and rallies calling for Gypsies to be 'sent to the gas chambers' or 'turned into soap,' ending with threats to burn down the camps. In some cases, caravans have been set alight, causing the deaths of camp residents. Forced evictions by police are also a frequent and sad reality. And it is the women and children who are the most vulnerable victims of this state violence.

Such situations have consequences on the detour of identity[32] and social life. Like other marginalized communities, the Gypsy community may show a high degree of solidarity, adherence to cultural norms, and cohesion, but at the same time, there can be a high level of conflict and violence; *internalized oppression* leads to low levels of self-esteem in the community and forms of self-hate,

which find a destructive outlet in disputes and quarrels, long-term resentment, and the inability to find agreements in the common interest.

At the social level, Gypsy, Roma, and Travellers are represented in a dual manner. In an idealized way, communities are seen as places where time and space can be a framework for collective bonding rather than mere commodities. Gadje people may find Gypsy interpersonal relations to be 'non-capitalistic' because of the unexpected emphasis on friendship, conviviality, reciprocity, support, and other non-material values. Yet these cultures are also depicted in the mainstream as brutal and materialistic, characterized by greed for gold and an exaggerated concern for money. In this case, the Gadje underestimate the economic insecurity under which Gypsies usually live, often due to not owning real estate. This is one of the reasons why families historically gave special importance to goods and valuables that could be hidden and carried away when the need to flee away.

Another of the most romanticized points of 'cultural diversity' relates to attitudes to the past and future. The western mind is often busy with memories of what has happened in the past, or expectations of what will be in the future, frequently at the expense of attention to the present situation. In contrast, Gypsies seem to be endowed with a virtue also found amongst high mountain dwellers and in indigenous/aboriginal contexts – the tendency to live in the present moment. That is, they inhabit time and space as an individual and collective presence, adhering to reality as whatever it is in its constantly changing nature.

Notes

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2 Cahn, Claude and Guild, Elspeth (2008), *Recent Migrations of Roma in Europe*. Available from: www.osce.org/hcnm/78034?download=true
3 Dom (or Lom), considered to be the original self-definition, means 'human being.'
4 www.middleeastGypsies.com/
5 As of 2011, the Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality estimates the number of 'ciganos' (Romanis) in Brazil at 800,000. http://noticias.r7.com/brasil/noticias/falta-de-politicas-publicas-para-ciganos-e-desafio-para-o-governo-20110524.html
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15 See Hancock, Ian (1987), *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of Gypsy Slavery and Persecution*, Karoma Publisher, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Hancock, Ian (2002), *We are the Romani people: Ame sam e rromane džene*, Centre de Recherches Tsiganes, University of Hertfordshire Press, Hatfield Hertfordshire.

16 Bernard Bruneteau defines the difference between *ethnocide*, in which deaths are the result of actions meant to culturally, socially, or politically annihilate a group, and *genocide*, where the physical extermination of the group is the explicit goal. Often ethnocide is a prelude or a first phase of genocide. Bernard, Bruneteau (2004), *Le Siècle des génocides: Violences, massacres et processus génocidaires de l'Arménie au Rwanda*, Armand Colin, Paris.

17 See also Kenrick, Donald and Puxton, Grattan (2009, 1st edition 1995), *Gypsies under the Swastika*, Gypsy Research Centre, University of Hertfordshire Press; Kenrick, Donald, ed. (1999), *In the Shadow of the Swastika*, Gypsy Research Centre, University of Hertfordshire Press.

18 Smith, Sherrie (2016), 'May 16th 1944 – the day of Sinti, Romani and Roma resistance, in *The Travellers' Times*, May 16, http://travellerstimes.org.uk/Blogs--Features/May-16th-1944-the-day-of-Sinti-Romani-and-Roma-.aspx.

> The Nazi intended to exterminate the Roma completely as early as May 1944. On May 15, Gypsy Camp director SS Georg Bonigut ordered the inmates to stay in their barracks. The next day, 50 to 60 SS men surrounded the camp. They attempted to force the prisoners out of the barracks, but failed to do so. The 16th of May 1944, men, women and children of the Gypsy camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, warned by the internal Resistance Network of the camp, got organized in order to fight off SS guards who came the same night to lead them to the Gas Chambers. Fearing casualties, the Nazi withdrew in front of the rebellion of Roma men, women and children. There were significant numbers of Wehrmacht veterans among the prisoners. The Nazi also feared that a mutiny could spread to other parts of the camp. On May 23, over 1,500 Roma were transferred from Birkenau to Auschwitz, from where they were subsequently transferred to

Buchenwald. Two days later, 82 Roma were shipped to the Flossenburg camp and 144 Roma women to Ravensbrueck. Fewer than 3,000 people remained in the Family Camp. The extermination of the Roma in Auschwitz-Birkenau occurred on the night of August 2/3, 1944. Despite resistance by the Roma, 2,897 men, women, and children were loaded on trucks, taken to gas chamber V, and exterminated.

www.ergonetwork.org/ergo-network/news/131/000000/16-of-May-Romani-Resistance-Day/. See Appendix n. 2.

19 See Amnesty International (2012), Report, www.osce.org/odihr/95145

20 Smith, Sherrie (2016). 'Annually there is a very moving service organized by The Gypsy Council in Hyde park to remember the night of August 2nd 1944, when the Nazi SS returned to the zigeunlager and succeeded in murdering the remaining 3,000 inhabitants of Auschwitz-Birkenau, but this is not official, nor is it attended or acknowledged by any Government representatives. The struggle for the recognition of the Roma and Sinti genocide has been going on for decades in the face of official indifference. The first community organized commemoration took place in 1967 in Bethnal Green, London, where Johnny Connors sang a poignant lament as a bender tent was burned in the memory of the Roma and Sinti Nazi victims. Gratton Puxon, a speaker on the day, recalled how Britain had come close to invasion by Nazi Germany, and that the Nazi high command had drawn up plans under "Operation Sea Lion" to round-up all the Gypsies and Travellers in the UK – alongside the Jews – to continue their evil crusade of genocidal extermination. Individually we must request that our local communities remember these dates – May 16th, the day of resistance, and August 2nd – the day of sorrow.' Ibid.

21 Burgio, Giuseppe (2016), 'Alla periferia dei gagé. La formazione di genere tra i rom e le romnià', *Civitas educationis. Education, Politics and Culture*, Vol. 5, N° 1, pp. 129–147. Available from: www.academia.edu/29996935/Alla_periferia_dei_gag%C3%A9._La_formazione_di_genere_tra_i_rom_e_le_romni%C3%A0_in_Civitas_educationis._Education_Politcs_and_Culture_anno_V_n._1_2016_pp._129-147_ISBN_9788857537818_ISSN_2280-6865

22 Amnesty International (2012), 'Roma and Sinti, with a Focus on Empowerment of Romani Women to Access Their Human Rights', October 10. Available from: www.osce.org/odihr/95145.

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24 European Roma Right Center (ERRC) Roma Rights: Journal of the (2015), *Nothing about Us Without Us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production*, N° 2, Budapest, pp. 83–84.

25 www.romadecade.org/

26 www.ceu.edu/event/2016-06-20/antiGypsyism-beyond-social-inclusion. Moreover, all member states of the Council of Europe as parties to the European Convention on Human Rights do not consider sexual orientation and gender identity – making it more difficult also for Gypsy LGB and for transgender and intersexuals: 'The Convention provides an open-ended list of grounds in Article 14 on the prohibition of discrimination, which are repeated in Protocol No. 12 of the Convention on the general prohibition of discrimination. The Protocol has a wider scope of application than Article 14 since the scope of its application is not limited to the rights and freedoms set out in the Convention itself. Neither Article 14 nor the Protocol specifically mentions sexual orientation or gender identity as prohibited grounds for discrimination but the commentary on the provisions of this Protocol stipulates that

the list of non-discrimination grounds is non-exhaustive; as a result, it leaves open the possibility for the European Court of Human Rights to find that a combination of grounds constitutes another protected status. Fremlova, Lucia and Georgescu, Mara, ed. (2014), *Barabaripen. Young Roma Speak about Multiple Discrimination*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, p. 99. www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/BARABARIPEN_en.pdf

27 Bird, Michael and Candea, Stefan (2014), 'Anti-Roma Views Rampant across All Romanian Political Parties', *EU Observer*. http://EU Observer.com/euelections/123907. See also Italian anti-Gypsy politician declaration: www.dailysabah.com/world/2015/04/10/italy-joins-france-and-serbia-persecuting-roma-minority.

28 www.errc.org/blog/dosta-basta-italia-yet-another-official-rebuke-for-roma-rights-abuses/120

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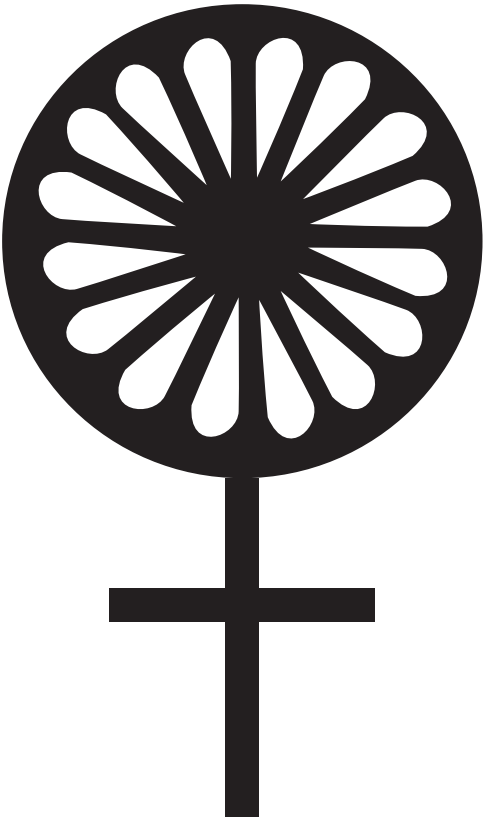

1 Patriarchal traditions and feminist intersectional research

We need to think and act
intersectionally
to understand
that we have been subjected
to multiple exclusions
and discriminations.

(Nicoleta Bitu, Eniko Vincze 2012, p. 45)

The intersectional approach proposes looking at inequalities comprehensively by intersecting them – understanding them as 'mutually constitutive,' rather than analyzing them separately.[1] In this way, the multiple effects of several forms of inequalities are seen through a prism that yields different pictures; such a complex view is vital in the development of intersectional politics of alliance and coalition.[2]

The recognition that Roma women suffer oppression doubly – inside and outside their communities – first appeared in international institutions with the 5th report of the United Nations in December 2010, when a section was devoted to the forms of multiple discrimination suffered by Romnya.[3] Conditions become more critical for disabled people and LGBT, as has been discussed by the European Roma Rights Center in a document titled *Multiple Discrimination*.[4] Yet European laws remain foggy about how to contrast multiple discrimination. There are no penalty provisions about discriminations of gender, race, and sexual orientation – no control or sanctions in the case that member states lack mandatory directives to prevent or punish multiple discriminations. The latter is mentioned only in paragraph 14 of Directive 2000/43/CE issued by the European Council on June 29, 2000. The document states the principle of equal treatment and parity among people of different race and ethnic origins, without any explicit reference to age, sexual orientation, religious belief, or different abilities, whereas these are mentioned in the Charter of Nice, implemented in 2009 thanks to the Lisbon Treaties.

The clumsy attempts of European institutions to encourage Roma 'inclusion' are still based on the disputable concept of 'integration,'[5] and often their documents ooze with prejudice, as in the recent four-year *Thematic Action Plan*

for Roma and Traveller Inclusion issued on March 7, 2016, by the Council of Europe.[6] A letter signed by 93 members of the European Academic Network on Romani Studies[7] explains the reasons why the document of the Council of Europe[8] has to be considered inappropriate. The letter states that the document attributes the blame for the effects of marginalization to the Roma themselves, and calls for its correction. The signatories of the letter requested this change directly of Thorbjørn Jagland, the Council of Europe's Secretary General.[9]

Despite European institutions' struggle to create documents addressing multiple discrimination, in many places the situation is worsening, both in terms of the empowerment of girls and in contrast to Romaphobia, which is targeted especially to women. Racist and anti-Gypsy rhetoric pervades the whole society. It can be found in hospitals and schools, mainstream media, and the public discourse of politicians; some parliamentarians even incite the devastation of Gypsy camps.[10] All this is done without contrition, reprimand by the legal system, or action by the public authorities responsible for the monitoring and prevention of hate crimes.

Roma communities have become accustomed to not trusting institutions. From top to bottom, they seem to expect nothing good of the state. On the other hand, some advances in Gypsy pride, self-organization, and enhancement of the positive processes of interculturality have taken place in fruitful, non-hierarchical relations between Gypsy and non-Gypsy grassroots activists, advocates, anti-racist groups, feminists, and educators who have supported endogenous processes of resilience in the Roma, Sinti, and Traveller communities, often with little or no financial support.[11]

Since 2005, European Commission documents about the situation of Roma women[12] have underlined the gravity of their situation, the fact that they are primarily in charge of child-raising, and the mediation between communities and local institutions. The level of analysis in European documents is poor, however, and the proposed practical solutions are unconvincing. Financial resources do not trickle down to effective projects to the extent it would be expected. Angéla Kóczé was probably the first scholar to note the lack of an intersectional approach throughout European documents on Roma women in the last decade.[13] The intersectional approach, as we will see, is crucial to understanding and contrasting multiple discrimination. By looking simultaneously at different forms of oppression, it can effectively address ethnic, gender and class issues in the Romani and Traveller communities and promote a more realistic picture of reality in the larger society. In fact, the prevalence of a stereotyping attitude among educators, social workers, administrators, and the medical profession tends to reinforce prejudices against Gypsy cultures, which are always represented as immutable, macho gerontocracies with women as helpless victims, especially when it comes to gendered forms of violence.

The Gypsy settlement context is often characterized by the hardship of economic survival. Social vexations and state violence toward communities are frequent. When combined with the persistence of patriarchal traditions, such circumstances explain the occurrence of domestic violence in the communities.

Until recently, women have been silent about it. If your community is constantly under attack, gender oppression within families is not perceived as being so important. Besides the known forms of violence (physical, sexual, psychological, and economic), there are specific forms of violence related to the patri-local context. For example, a bride's mother-in-law often exerts full authority over the newcomer, and it is not unusual in some areas for her to beat up her son's young wife 'for correction.' The cultural pressure to behave traditionally – e.g., covering the head with a scarf, always wearing long skirts, looking down in front of males – represents an outdated set of behaviors, a 'forced conformism' perceived as unbearable by the younger generations. In some communities wearing trousers is not allowed for women, so wearing jeans becomes a conquest for girls struggling for freedom of expression within their culture. As an interviewee reported:

> My idea is that there are women who let someone mistreat them, and women who react and think by themselves . . . I say they should react, don't let the husband mistreat her – it is the women who have to react, as we are doing today. Now Roma women understand we have choices and here there are girls who have a job . . . we live in a Roma community where everybody wears a long skirt and, despite this, we wear trousers. Should we listen to what they say?[14]

Feminist research-action against domestic violence in Gypsy camps and communities has been carried out successfully. Women researchers have produced significant results by adopting participatory methodology, intersectionality, and non-Eurocentric approaches. Among them are the *Segretariato Gitano* in Spain, and the *Fondazione Brodolini* in Italy. Projects such as *Empow-air* look at violence as a structural element in male-dominated societies *everywhere*: 'There is no country in the world where women are free from violence.'[15] All societies tend to deny, legitimize, or minimize the occurrence of violence against women, and this contributes to keeping them in a subaltern position. This also happens in Gypsy communities, but culture can never be an explanation for patriarchy – culture only accounts for the specific ways in which patriarchy is articulated.[16]

One of the findings of *Empow-air* research-action is that gender activists and feminists need to focus on *all types of violence* Gypsy women face today, including state violence, police harassment, Romaphobic attacks, forced eviction from camps, and material and symbolic forms of institutional racism. A discursive practice around family violence should overcome resistances and defensive behaviors among both women and men of different ages and backgrounds. Talking about domestic abuse is still a taboo. A legal charge brought by a victim is seen as a violation of group solidarity; it means ruining the image of the whole community. In particular, Gadje (non-Gypsy) activists need to have cultural competence, skills, sensitivity, and an inclination for intercultural exchanges. They must be committed to constantly deconstructing their own

privileges, assumptions, white attitudes, and the *Weltanshauung* (visions of the world) produced by the culture they live in, which are perceived as 'natural' and strongly influence the way other cultures are considered.[17]

While for the white feminist movement *going public* about gendered forms of violence was considered an important political step, for women of color and oppressed communities this has proved not to be the way in many cases.[18] The creation of ethnically sensitive empowerment projects allows safe places for women and girls to talk about intimate issues, such as sexuality, virginity, early marriage, and harassment, to be established. New modes of confronting domestic and sexual violence have been produced, such as the formation of *peer pressure groups* among men to delegitimize machismo, domineering behaviors and the sexual stereotyping of women in male-only discourses and homosocial spaces. Participative theater is a tool Gypsy women are using to sensitize the community to gender violence. As reported in *The Travellers' Times*, women took it to the stage in June 2016 to highlight issues around domestic abuse. The Travellers Movement was successful in getting funding for a woman's drama group for a community theater production, 'Never going to beat you,' performed by Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller women. The play was written by playwright Jenny Buchman and draws attention to violence as it is experienced

> by a large number of Gypsy and Traveller women in the UK: a 2007 study found that 81% of Irish Traveller women and 61% of English Gypsy women in married relationships had directly experienced domestic abuse. Discussing violence within marriage is far too often seen as a no-go subject.[19]

Cultural initiatives such as songs, movies, and plays produced within the community may have a greater impact than institutional plans to prevent violence in the family. In fact, in some gender projects Gadje women activists are often found to lack the background regarding traditions and ways of life necessary for dealing with sensitive issues.

> Many Travellers hold traditional views on marriage, with divorce a rarity, and a woman leaving a marriage can be ostracized. A reluctance to deal with the police, coupled with a lack of knowledge about mainstream services, may also complicate the situation. For Gypsy and Traveller women who live a nomadic life, or who have lived in camp sites all their lives, moving into a refuge and leaving their life and family behind can lead to isolation, anxiety, depression. This can be a daunting experience, so Gypsy and Traveller women often stay in the violent situation for longer.[20]

Changes of perspective are needed: gender violence should not be considered an issue for Gypsy women to fight alone, but rather a community problem that needs to be faced. Domestic and sexual abuse are indicators of a power imbalance between men and women, one that starts with boys and girls. Men should

be persuaded to consider new models of non-dominant masculinities, with participation in groups and cultural initiatives in which patriarchal assumptions are deconstructed and violence is delegitimized.

A study intersecting gender, ethnicity, and class in the Romani women's movement pointed out how women have been able to renegotiate their relations with Gadje, change the Romani movement's political agenda, generate new forms of knowledge among activists, engage in alliances, and reshape the discourse about change in the communities:

> By using an intersectionality approach, Romani women respond to the limitations of 'ethnicity' but also to the limitations of 'gender' as the exclusive categories of interest to them. Intersectionality is the approach that helped more people become reflective to the hybrid structures of inequalities Romani women face. Intersections of categories of difference still urge a need for Romani women activists to create politicized spaces where they could continue developing arguments emerging from their own experiences and challenge simultaneously the general discourse of the Romani movement and the general feminist discourse.[21]

In the Gypsy milieu, *marital status* should be added to the other axes of difference – class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, education – since it plays an important role in women's personal experiences, especially in terms of power positions in the community. It also makes a great difference whether professionals and activists are married or not.

> If a woman fulfills all the 'criteria' such as having a husband, children, and speaking Romani language, she has more chances for representing her interest within the Romani movement. A position of a woman within the Romani movement is said to be also depending on her husband's position within the movement (if he is a Romani activist or not).[22]

The importance of intersectionality in Roma feminism needs to be stressed. In fact, without a feminist intersectional approach, women remain invisible. Alexandra Oprea, in her essay 'The Erasure of Romani Women in Statistical Data,' magisterially denounces the way in which statistics are constructed:

> The conceptualization of race and gender as separate and even unrelated categories has perpetuated the marginalization of Romani women in the collection of statistical data. Inherent flaws in the exclusive categories in data collection processes underscore the invisibility of Romani women. Race and gender do not exist in isolation (. . .). The marginalization of Romani women must therefore be understood in the context of both racism and sexism. Ethnic statistics are necessary, but must be collected in such a way as to reflect the intersection of race and gender. A multidimensional approach to the collection of data is an important facet to

> designing policies and programs to combat institutional discrimination against Romani women. (. . .) Disaggregated data on minorities is a necessary tool to successfully combat structural inequality. I echo the opinions of human rights activists who believe that the participation of grassroots activists is an indispensable part of the data collection process, and that the collection of data must be clearly linked to the implementation of programs for the benefit of the marginalized community. However, I contend that the current data collection approaches are flawed in that they perpetuate the notion of race and gender as mutually exclusive by collecting 'gender data' and 'ethnic data' separately. This practice excludes Romani women and other women of color and must be transcended in order to remedy the multiple forms of discrimination facing these women.[23]

In support of such a critique, Alexandra Oprea offers interesting cases. World Bank data related to employment discrimination lack an intersectional approach, and this deficiency has been detrimental to the understanding of the Roma women's situation. Also, the report on the status of women in Romania by the *International Helsinki Federation of Human Rights* focuses primarily on white Romanian women. Oprea indicates how 'Romani women are only marginally included in a one-page section.' The report also neglects race in its domestic violence section, *Police Response to Domestic Violence*, in which there is no mention of the race-related barriers that inhibit many Romani women from escaping domestic violence. Not surprisingly, one of these barriers is 'the fear of police brutality directed against Roma, which can deter Romani women from reporting domestic violence to the police.'[24]

The lack of an intersectional approach in feminist analysis may have misleading outcomes. As in the notorious case of the article 'My big fat Gypsy gender disparity,' and the related clips 'Love at first grab,'[25] racial stereotypes are assumed in an unquestioning way in a legal feminist theory publication offering a critical description of courtship. Eurocentric categories are used by the author in an unquestioning way, resulting in being culturally blind to 'important elements of agency and resistance enacted by those who are portrayed as helpless subjects.'[26]

European anti-discriminatory policies have also proven inadequate in the quality of intersectional methodology. A study carried out during the last decade by Emanuela Lombardo and Lise Rolandsen Agustin, based on an analysis of European documents, demonstrated that the quality of intersectionality in gender equality policies needs to be improved. Within the *Quing Project*,[27] they suggested an *intersectionality impact assessment* based upon several criteria. To evaluate the level of intersectional analysis in European Union documents, Lombardo and Rolandsen Agustin looked at the internal consistency of studies, gender explicitness, structural understanding of gender inequality, comprehensiveness, and inclusiveness of civil society. The authors also warned that 'a research focus on "intersectionality only" might obscure the analysis of the distinctive ontology of each inequality.'[28]

Eleanor Robertson contributed to the debate in her article 'In defense of Intersectionality,' arguing that intersectional methodology is one of the most important tools on offer today:

> intersectionality has been variously described as meaningless, too radical, and a threat to the sisterhood. This level of backlash from those who hold power within feminism is usually a pretty good sign that the target of their ire is something worthwhile.[29]

While agreeing with her conclusion, I also believe intersectionality does not explain everything. In fact, in indigenous contexts it is not very helpful for historical reasons. However, despite its limits, intersectional methodology still represents one of feminism's best tools, while the lack of an intersectional approach is often an indicator of limited research findings, weak analysis, and poor political strategy. Within the community of Roma activists, criticism has been directed at groups lacking intersectionality.[30]

Studies based on intersectional analysis among Gypsy communities in eastern countries uncovered the *ethnified* feminization of poverty in 'postsocialist' transitions. The research, carried out by Ildikó Asztalos Morell, focuses on gender equality struggles of Roma women in Hungary, and points out how 'feminist mobilization was hindered by the alleged association between state socialism and women.'[31] Asztalos Morell shows the different layers of Roma women's 'otherness' and their sufferance due to stigmatization related to giving birth to 'too many children'. While in public discourse Gypsy women are represented as undeserving citizens because of their elevated natality, Roma ethnographer Pál Ruva Farkas admires the willingness of Lovári Roma[32] to maintain a high fertility rate 'as insurance for recreating the race,'[33] despite all the gender issues encompassed in such a survival policy.

Romani feminists, who are often accused of dividing the Romani movement, can effectively use an intersectional approach to explain how racism cannot be confronted alone as it is intertwined with sexism and class/status inequalities. Jovanovic and Daroczi, in their essay 'Still Missing Intersectionality: The Relevance of Feminist Methodologies in the Struggle for the Rights of Roma,' point out how Romani women do not want to exert any form of separatism or divisive politics in their communities. On the contrary, they aim to deconstruct the different forms of patriarchal domination and oppression by enhancing women's agency and through the liberation of the whole community:

> We argue that the Romani movement must incorporate intersectional approaches to a greater extent, to avoid a narrow Romani identity politics that assumes national identity as having exclusive relevance to the experience of Romani people at a given time. (. . .) Our experience shows that intersectionality should be incorporated to a greater extent in order to make the discourses within the Romani movement more inclusive. (. . .) Intersectionality is one of the feminist theories and methodologies that

> might help more people become reflective to the hybrid structures of inequalities Roma face.[34]

Jovanovic and Daroczi effectively make an argument in favor of intersectional politics, explaining why it is relevant in the context of the Romani movement and helpful in creating much needed alliances.

> Statements implying that 'we are concerned with national or ethnic identity' in the struggle for the rights of Roma assume that all Roma are in the same power position in each context and disregard all other dimensions of our identities as those of high political relevance. What we would like to emphasize is that this statement is elitist and that the leaders of the Romani movement often seem not to consider elitism when conceptualizing their ideas. Being an activist within the Romani movement seems to require considerable privilege, which is not available to individuals who understand their own identities as more complex and fluid. (. . .) [Being concerned only with national or ethnic identity] suggests that national or ethnic dimensions of our identities somehow exist isolated from other dimensions. (. . .) Intersectionality clearly denies both isolation and hierarchy of social categories. Intersectionality is therefore very much still of relevance in rethinking Romani politics.[35]

As stated by Angéla Kóczé, the development of intersectional approaches and methods may bring new transformational politics in Europe; it helps to recognize and address Romani women's issues while enhancing the social position of men and boys, which emerge as critical in work by Jelena Jovanovic on their specific vulnerability, who discusses

> disadvantages suffered also by Romani boys who are vulnerable to specific forms of trafficking in human beings, such as in the case of street children in Belgrade. The ignorance of the political and policy discourse towards Romani boys (. . .) and toward the context results in a lack of prevention, assistance and protection measures for Romani boys.[36]

I would like to add that intersectionality is instrumental to understanding the particular coercion some men suffer due to having to stage obsolete patriarchal attitudes: there is also a performativity burden in the *machista* models of masculinity, which is combined with privileged power relations.

The alliance between Romani and non-Romani feminists is discussed by Jelena Jovanović, Angéla Kóczé, and Lídia Balogh as a milieu in which to share support and exchange knowledge and experience in an egalitarian relationship, while fighting together for social equality. As their article points out, in the Romani movement

> women were often considered as furniture, used as tokens, manipulated by Romani men leaders and at the best, they worked as secretaries. (. . .)

> There are still Romani organizations dominated by old macho men. (. . .) They still give many stories where they are victimized by harassment, sexism, misogyny, and even violent attacks in the offices, at the meetings (. . .) Romani feminists face many challenges. Romani men leaders often accuse them of 'dividing the Romani movement'. Sometimes, Romani feminists are defined as 'white Romani'.[37]

Romani feminists are still asked to choose between being Romani activists or feminists.[38] The either/or dilemma creates discomfort and the feeling of having to bear a 'double militancy.' These are not new issues. In North America, feminists of color were asked to choose if it were more important to belong to a race or a gender. In Europe, women factory workers were asked by unionists to favor class struggle over feminism. In former colonies, freedom fighters had to 'prioritize' and give up their struggle as women to pursue the national liberation goal. All over the world, feminists have been charged with accusations of being race/nation traitors or inter-classist petit bourgeois. Only Kurdish feminism, in the context of Rojava democratic federalism, has been able to conquer primacy for women liberation and goals, having all understood the need for confronting gender power issues: no liberation is possible, no equality can be achieved, if these processes do not start within the communities (Öcalan 2016; Corradi 2016; Sáenz 2017).

Intersectional feminism is a powerful tool for everybody – for women and for men – to strengthen all communities and find alliances in the struggle against economic inequalities, different forms of social anti-Gypsyism, and Romaphobic politics; and in contrasting the combination of racism and sexism Gypsy women face every day. This also includes *internalized prejudice* in white feminist movements and among pro-Roma activists. The challenge represented by intersectionality implies the overcoming of competing identities, such as being a Gypsy and being a woman. Dealing with different inequalities simultaneously gives power to Gypsy feminism, which can relate to (and transcend at the same time) the experience of Gadje feminism as having both enabling and constraining qualities.

White feminists need to acknowledge inequalities based on race/color/class/status and gender as mutually constitutive. For this purpose, Jovanović, Kóczé, and Balogh offer a real example.

> A violent attack a Romani woman survived in a public place by an anti-racist activist was framed (. . .) as an act of violence against women, by a non-Romani feminist activist and scholar, but also as an effect of permanent patriarchy within the Romani movement, by a Romani feminist activist and scholar.[39]

It is interesting to notice how the account given by the Gadje feminist was *color-blind*: it represented her standpoint and situated knowledge; being a white woman and considering herself as having no ethnic characterizations,

she experienced the event as gender violence with no further quality. For the Romani feminist, instead, the act of violence represented the specific expression of an ethnic patriarchy she knew well. The risks related to both ethnicization and *de-ethnicization* of gender violence has been discussed. On one side, ethnicization of gender violence falls into the old stereotyping of Gypsy men as evil, aggressive, brutal, and rapists; on the other side, the *de-ethnicization* of gender violence makes cultural differences invisible, including color and social status, and ultimately deprives feminist action of specific tools, languages, and lines of reasoning.[40] Alexandra Oprea, in 'The Erasure of Romani Women in Statistical Data,' compares the minimization of ethnic differences among feminists with a lack of recognition of gender inequalities in the Romani anti-racist movement.

> The limited feminist and antiracist politics in Europe systematically ignore Romani women. Romani non-governmental organizations (NGOs), at the forefront of the antiracist struggle in Europe, address racism but fail to address the role of patriarchy as a key factor in the oppression of Romani women. Feminist organizations in Europe, in turn, focus on gender subordination but neglect racism, a crucial barrier for Romani women. By treating race and gender as mutually exclusive categories, Romani NGOs and feminist organizations alike fail to tackle the multi-faceted discrimination from which Romani women suffer.[41]

We still need intersectionality to shape political discourse and conduct.[42] Intersectional activism is a rich source that argues for the necessity of building stronger coalitions.[43]

Notes

1 Davis, Angela (1981), *Women, Race, & Class*, Random House, New York; Crenshaw, Kimberle (1989), 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex. A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 1, N° 8, pp. 139–167; Crenshaw, Kimberle (1991), 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, N° 6, pp. 1241–1299; Hill, Collins Patricia (1990), *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge, New York; Hurtado, Aída (1989), 'Reflections on White Feminism: A Perspective from a Woman of Color', in *Social and Gender Boundaries in the United States*, ed. by S. Chan and J. Currie, Edwin Mellen Press, Queenston – New York; Yuval-Davis, Nira (2006), 'Intersectionality and Feminist Politics', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 13, N° 3, pp. 193–209; Yuval-Davis, Nira (2012), *The Politics of Belonging. Intersectional Contestations*, University of East London, London.

2 Lykke, Nina (2010), *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing*, Routledge, New York; Hancock, Ange-Marie (2007), 'When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition: Examining Intersectionality as a Research Paradigm', *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5, N° 1, pp. 63–79; Walby, Sylvia (2007), *A Review of Theory and Methodology for the Analysis of the Implications*

of Intersectionality for Gender Equality Policies in the EU, Report Quing (Quality in Gender and Equality Policies) Vienna; Walby, Sylvia, Armstrong, Jo and Strid, Sofia (2009), *Intersectionality and the Quality of Equality Architecture in Britain*, N° 47/49, Quing, Iwm, Vienna. Available from: www.quing.eu/files/WHY/walby_armstrong_strid.pdf.

3 www. Ohchr.org.

4 European Roma Rights Center (2010), 'Multiple Discrimination', *Roma Rights*, N° 2, April. See also the ONU CEDAW Convention, December 2010. Available from: www.Ohchr.org.

5 Integration is quite an ethnocentric term, recalling the idea of an homogenous context in which foreign elements are allowed in – on the condition of keeping its integrity. As has been previously argued, there is 'some integralism in the concept of integration' (Bonfiglioli et al. 2009). The distance between the concepts of assimilation and integration, as well as the reality, is not so wide.

6 www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma-latest-news

7 The European Academic Network on Romani Studies was set up in 2011 by the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

8 http://romanistudies.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/news_page_16.03.2016.jpg

9 The text of the letter: http://romanistudies.eu/news/open-letter-to-the-secretary-general-of-the-council-of-europe/

The signatories of the European Academic Network on Romani Studies are based at over 70 different universities and research institutions in more than 20 different countries. They include eminent scholars such as historians Henriette Asséo and David Mayall, anthropologists Michael Stewart and Alain Reyniers, ethnomusicologists Carol Silverman and Iren Kertesz Wilkinson, social policy experts Margaret Greenfields and Phillip Brown, and linguists Ian Hancock and Victor Friedman. The list also includes some key figures from Romani cultural and public engagement initiatives, such as Jana Horvathová of the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno, musician Santino Spinelli of the Università degli Studi di Chieti, Rumyan Russinov of the Public Policy Advocacy Centre, and Traveller activist and researcher Janie Codona.

10 Matteo Salvini, the head of Italy's Northern League (regarding Roma camps in the country), is a champion of anti-Gypsyism and anti-Roma hate speech. Salvini said in an interview that he would 'give six months' notice then raze the Roma camps to the ground.' Available from: www.dailysabah.com/world/2015/04/10/italy-joins-france-and-serbia-persecuting-roma-minority. See also: Bird, Michael and Candea, Stefan (2014), 'Anti-Roma Views Rampant across All Romanian Political Parties', *EU Observer*. Available from: http://EU Observer.com/euelections/123907

11 Among these, the *Chejà Celen* ('Dancing Girls') Project was created in the city of Rome, in a large Gypsy camp, activating laboratories in the community, which ended in the inauguration of a traditional dance group. Labs involved the manufacturing of dancing clothes, musical instruments, and players, the collective training of girls starting from as young as 3. The experience of Chejà Celen has been successful – the group operates in autonomy and has been invited to perform across Italy. It is a good instance of cooperation within the community for girls' empowerment and an example for other camps, stimulating community resilience processes. Mancini Vania, *Chejà Celen. Ragazze che ballano*, Sensibili alle Foglie, Roma 2007.

12 *Ethnic Minority and Roma Women in Europe*, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2009. See also *The Social Situation of the Roma and Their Improved Access to the Labour Market in the EU Policy*, European Parliament Department Economic and Scientific Policy, 2008.

13 Kóczé, Angela (2009), 'Missing Intersectionality: Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Class in Current Research and Policies on Romani Women in Europe', *Policy Studies Series*, Center for Policy Studies, Budapest; Kóczé, Angela (2011), *Gender, Ethnicity and Class: Romani Women's Political Activism and Social Struggle*, Central European University, Budapest.
14 Genova, Angela (2012), *Rapporto di Ricerca Italia. Progetto Empow-Air Empowering Women Against Intimate Partnership Violence in Roma Communities*, Fondazione Brodolini, Roma. (my translation)
15 Surt, Fondazione Brodolini, Fundaciò de Dones and Fondazione Segretariato Gitano (2012), *Contrasto alla violenza maschile contro le donne Rom: Raccomandazioni per la prevenzione, l'individuazione e l'intervento*, (Progetto Daphne 2007–2013), p. 7.
16 Ibid.
17 Hill, Collins Patricia (1998), 'It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation', *Hypatia*, Vol. 13, N° 3, pp. 62–82.
18 There may be historical reasons for the fact that white women found the legal way a practicable part of the emancipatory process. Today, some experiments aim beyond compulsory procedures involving police and the state apparatus. In Germany, new feminist approaches are geared toward overcoming the necessity of legal charges against the perpetrator in sexual violence cases, promoting community conflict resolutions meant to protect the victim from undesired exposure and prevent the violent male from repeating the offense.
19 O'Driscoll, Josie (2016), 'Never Going to Beat You'. New Traveller-led play about domestic violence, *The Travellers' Times*, 30 March 2016.
20 Ibid.
21 Jovanović, Jelena, Kóczé, Angéla and Balogh, Lídia (2015), *Intersections of Gender, Ethnicity, and Class: History and Future of the Romani Women's Movement*, Center for Policy studies, Budapest, p. 3.
22 Ibid, p. 9.
23 Oprea, Alessandra (2009), *The Erasure of Romani Women in Statistical Data: Limits of the Race-versus-Gender Approach*, New York: Open Society Institute. Available from: www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/roma-data-20030403.pdf (October 11, 2009 www.eumap.org)
24 Ibid.
25 http://femlegaltheory.blogspot.it/2012/10/my-big-fat-Gypsy-gender-disparity.html
26 Corradi, Laura (2013), 'Femminismo, post-colonialità e metodo intersezionale nelle narrazioni Romnì e nella prevenzione della violenza di genere', *Donne Rom. Condizione femminile, diritti umani e non discriminazione*, Unar, Istiss, Rome, pp. 7–38.
27 QUING (Quality in Gender and Equality Policies) was funded within the European Commission's 6th Framework (FP6 Integrated Project – 2006–2011). Available from: www.quing.eu
28 Lombardo, Emanuela and Rolandsen, Agustin Lise (2011), 'Framing Gender Intersections in the European Union: What Implications for the Quality of Intersectionality in Policies', *Social Politics*, N° 4, p. 485. See also Hancock, Ange-Marie (2007), 'When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition: Examining Intersectionality as a Research Paradigm', *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5, N° 1, pp. 63–79; Walby, Sylvia (2007), *A Review of Theory and Methodology for the Analysis of the Implications of Intersectionality for Gender Equality Policies in the EU*, Report Quing (Quality in Gender and Equality Policies) Vienna; Walby, Sylvia, Armstrong, Jo

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29 Eleanor, Robertson (2013), 'In Defence of Intersectionality – One of Feminism's Most Important Tools', *The Guardian*, 23 December. Available from: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/23/in-defence-of-intersectionality

30 As in the case of the Romani feminist organization Asociatia Femeilor din Romania, whose approach and agenda seem to be merely gender-based, lacking references to ethnic discriminations. Available from: www.afr.ro (Cea mai reprezentativa asociatie de femei din Romania).

31 Ildikó, Asztalos Morell (2015), 'Gender Equality Struggles. An Intersectional Analysis With Focus on Roma Women in Hungarian Ngos', *Baltic Worlds Baltic Worlds*, N° 3–4, p. 38. Available from: http://balticworlds.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Ildiko-Asztalos-morell.pdf

32 Lovári are one of the Roma groups coming from Hungary, today found in several European countries.

33 Ildikó, Asztalos Morell (2015), 'Gender Equality Struggles. An Intersectional Analysis with Focus on Roma Women in Hungarian NGOs', *Baltic Worlds Baltic Worlds*, N° 3–4, p. 38. http.balticworlds.com; Pál, Ruva Farkas (2013), *Gypsy passio: A cigànyok szenvedés*, Cigàni Irószövetség és Nemzeti (Köz) Müvelödési Társaság, Budapest.

34 Jovanović, Jelena and Daróczi, Anna (2015), 'Still Missing Intersectionality: The Relevance of Feminist Methodologies in the Struggle for the Rights of Roma', *Roma Rights: Journal of the European Roma Right Center*, N° 2, Budapest, p. 79. Available from: www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/roma-rights-2-2015-nothing-about-us-without-us.pdf

35 Ibid, pp. 80–81.

36 On human trafficking in the Gypsy context see: Jelena, Jovanovic (2015), *Vulnerability of Roma. Policy Discourse on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in Serbia: Perspectives of the National Policy Actors*, Center for Policy Studies Working Papers, CEU Center for Policy Studies, Budapest.

37 Jovanović, Jelena, Kóczé, Angéla and Balogh, Lídia (2015), *Intersections of Gender, Ethnicity, and Class: History and Future of the Romani Women's Movement*, Center for Policy studies, Budapest, p. 11.

38 Jovanović, Jelena and Daróczi, Anna (2015).

39 Jovanović, Jelena, Kóczé, Angéla and Balogh, Lídia (2015), *Intersections of Gender, Ethnicity, and Class: History and Future of the Romani Women's Movement*, Friedrich ebert stiftung Buro Budapest, CEU Center for Policy studies, Central European University, Budapest, p. 12.

40 Ildikó, Asztalos Morell (2015), 'Gender Equality Struggles. An Intersectional Analysis with Focus on Roma Women in Hungarian Ngos', *Baltic Worlds Baltic Worlds*, N° 3–4, pp. 34–46. http.balticworlds.com; Jovanović, Jelena, Kóczé, Angéla and Balogh, Lídia (2015), *Intersections of Gender, Ethnicity, and Class: History and Future of the Romani Women's Movement*, Center for Policy studies, Budapest.

41 Oprea, Alexandra (2009), *The Erasure of Romani Women in Statistical Data: Limits of the Race-versus-Gender Approach*, Open Society Institute, New York. Available from: www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/roma-data-20030403.pdf (www.eumap.org)

42 Jovanović, Jelena and Daróczi, Anna (2015).

43 Ibid.

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2 Twenty years of gender activism and feminism

Can we discover a way
to live our 'Gypsyhood'
as feminists?

(Trinidad Muñoz 2006)

The question Trinidad Muñoz asked in her article 'Gypsy Women in the 21st century,' published in the journal *Vidas Gitanas/Lungo Drom*, is a crucial one today: how can feminism combine with Gypsyhood? Muñoz announces 'the dawn of a new critical feminist Gypsy awareness'[1] – something to look for, and learn from, in the feminist milieu to enhance intersectional politics, alliances, and coalition building.

In this chapter, we look at some examples of a multifaceted process implying the growth of gender consciousness. These include the multiplication of Gypsy women's groups and networks, with increased visibility also in social media, and the germination of specific forms of feminism.

Throughout history, the strength of women has always been fundamental to the survival of Gypsy communities under persecution and genocide, as it is today under western democracies, characterized by systemic discrimination. In introducing a discourse around Gypsy political subjectivity and agency, it is appropriate to remember that the first Panhellenic Association of Roma People was founded in 1939 by two women.[2] Since then, women have been increasingly active as members, protagonists, and even funders of associations struggling for social rights and against Romaphobia, both locally and transnationally. In the last two decades, women's politics has become a reality, but although different forms of gender activism and Gypsy feminism have arisen, these phenomena cannot be simply overlapped. As Jovanović, Kóczé, and Balogh warned, given the heterogeneity of activism and the diversity of political commitment, priorities, and agendas, 'one has to be careful in looking at the Romani women's movement as a feminist movement.'[3] Poverty and anti-Gypsyism, which lie at the root of discrimination in terms of health, education, housing, jobs, and social protection, remain major problems.

Geographical variations, historical backgrounds, religious and cultural differences, and diverse forms of patriarchy among Gypsy communities have given rise to various models of women's activism and leadership, at times producing changes in local policies. As an example, in the United Kingdom the Gypsy and Travellers Exchange suggested that the City Council of Leeds take an innovative approach to roadside families, namely 'negotiated stopping,' which was accepted by the local government. As Helen Jones wrote, within a couple of years the council declared that it was 'saving £2000 every week; yes every single week, compared to the previous practice of evictions. This is without considering the non-cost benefits of goodwill and community cohesion'[4] achieved through community participative practices and women's agency.

The feminist wind of freedom that profoundly reshaped western European societies during the 1970s seemed not to have impacted traditional Roma families at the time. Yet through the 1990s, after the reunification of East and West Germany, many groups of Gypsy women started to flourish, such as the Gypsy Mothers Association founded in Hungary in 1991. The *Manifesto of Roma Women* was written during an international congress of Roma groups in Sevilla in 1994. In 1998, the Open Society Institutes organized an International Conference of Romani Women in Budapest, Hungary, which gave rise to the *Joint Romani Women's Initiative* (JRWI). In 1999, an International Conference of Roma Women was held in Bucharest, under the title 'Public Policies and Romani Women in Central and Eastern Europe'. A final declaration was produced with a strong emphasis on activism and community leadership.[5]

In the year 2000, an international conference in Madrid, Gypsy Community: From Equality We Conquer Rights, highlighted the need to focus on Gypsy women and multiple forms of exclusion. In 2002, after a meeting in Vienna about health care, Romani women activists from 18 European countries launched the International Romani Women's Network (IRWN). From a political point of view, networks tend to reproduce the usual divide between moderate and the radical wings of social movements, with JRWI representing the progressive side and IRWN the conservative one. The former is ready to participate in the transnational feminist arena, while the latter, which is more traditionally oriented, is reluctant to deal with topics such as sexual harassment, prostitution, and gender-based violence. Feminist researchers commented[6] (by referring to Rita Izsak's work)[7] how often such different political attitudes among Roma women seem to arise from a generation gap more than any ideological cause.

The last decade witnessed the sprouting of foundations and associations of Gypsy women and feminist groups. Amongst these were Arakerando[8] and the Asociacion Gitanas Feministas por la Diversidad in Spain, where on February 11, 2008, a new Women's Manifesto was issued by the Instituto de Cultura Gitana in Madrid. In eastern Europe too, several groups came to life, including the MONA-Magyar Noi Alapitvany (Foundation for the Women of Hungary),

with an innovative program aimed at creating a sustainable mentoring network based on personal–professional relationships between Roma and non-Roma women.[9] The alliance between Gypsy and Gadje women proved to be fruitful also in Spain, as Lidia Puigvert has pointed out.[10] A gathering sponsored by the Rom Network and the Panhellenic Intermunicipal Network for the Support of Greek Roma took place in Athens on January 11–12, 2010, with the 2nd International Conference of Roma Women, titled *I am a European Roma Woman*. The conference dealt with the issue of citizenship and the necessity of changing negative images of Roma women in the media.

In Vienna, during a two-day roundtable of experts (September 6–7, 2012) on Women as Agents of Change in Migrant, Minority, Roma, and Sinti Communities, organized by the Gender Section of the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE), several points relating to ways of supporting women in taking on community leadership roles and participating in political processes were agreed. Among these was the institution of a Summer School of Leadership Skills, organized by the OSCE Mission in Moldova. The publication of the proceedings show that improving the status of marginalized women is seen as having 'a multiplier effect on the marginalized communities they live in, and will over time lead to increased stability and security for the society as a whole.'[11] Issues related to health and the specific oppression of Gypsy women have been discussed, such as those raised by Elena Gorolova from the Group of Roma Women Harmed by Sterilization. A whole chapter should be devoted to the various attempts to eliminate Gypsies through the manipulation of reproductive health, and to the narration of hidden stories of ethnocidal policies and resistance.[12]

In Warsaw, Poland, during the OSCE Review Conference on Human Dimension Implementation (September 27, 2012), Roma, Sinti, and Traveller women expressed concern about economic crises, pointing out that European governments were still not addressing the social consequences of such crises on their communities and issuing a set of recommendations.[13] In the *Warsaw Romani, Sinti and Travellers Declaration* at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, a set of concerns and recommendations were formulated relating to education, housing, health care, freedom from violence, and the development and implementation of empowerment policies. In the declaration, the EU 'Strategy for equality between women and men 2010–2015' was criticized. This important strategic document did not refer at all to the particular situation of Romani women and lacked any planned intervention.[14]

Since then, the promotion of gender equality has been one of the key challenges faced by Gypsy women. Gender issues became the focus of a consultative meeting for Roma and Sinti women activists at the Warsaw headquarters of the OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), on May 18 and 19, 2015. The meeting brought together Roma and Sinti women activists from different States. At the end, an Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti was issued and commitments were pledged by ODIHR and women activists. Nesime Salioska, a Roma activist from the

former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, commented that 'providing role models and success stories for Romani women activists is crucial in changing attitudes and behavior towards women's issues in Roma communities.'[15]

The production of knowledge about gender issues in Gypsy communities and the participation of Gypsy women in academia has become a reality. One of the associations connecting Gypsy women across universities is Fakali – Mujeres Gitanas Universitaria, whose President is Beatriz Carrillo de los Reyes. It brings together Gypsy women across academia, and is active on social networks.[16]

One of the issues, discussed in greater detail later, regards the ways in which Gypsy scholarly production is unnoticed or disregarded in university environments, which are prone to neglecting 'different' perspectives or what may be considered 'unconventional' approaches. On the other hand, gender activists and researchers from Gypsy communities may become visible because of mass media voyeurism on the 'Gypsy way of life.' This happened in the case of Kalderash intellectual Luminiţa Mihai Cioabă, a philologist, writer, and feminist. She came into the spotlight for a controversy relating to the arranged marriage of her 12-year-old niece, which she fiercely opposed in a fight against her brother. When the community came under attack as a result of sudden media interest, she chose to defend her family from criminalization and stand up for 'Gypsy traditions.'[17]

It is important to emphasize the clash between Gypsyphobic forms of stereotyping reinforced on television and the slow pace of change in gender dynamics within communities. This case also highlighted a recurrent tension between ethnic loyalty and women's aspirations, common to many cultures in transition. At the risk of making a comparative comment, a similar contradiction developed around *female genital modification* in areas of the African continent and among African migrants in the EU. The normative interest of white feminists and international agencies exposed different cultural practices in an inappropriate and wholesale manner, as if they were all mutilations and infibulations. Genital modifications, including female circumcision, have always been represented as inhumane, whereas male circumcision in other cultures is treated quite differently. Moreover, while clitoridectomy is understood within a framework of ethnic patriarchal rule, such practices have been variously related to the colonial past, as extreme forms of resistance to slavery.[18] In the face of Western attitudes of disrespect and spectacularization, and as a consequence of them, local feminists and gender activists often retreat into a defense of their own cultures from racist and Eurocentric attacks.

Frictions between feminism and community identity, gender and ethnicity, have come under scrutiny in the Gypsy context. Irina Ilisei wrote an article on the contribution of feminism and inter-culturalism in the education of Roma women in Romania, looking at how gender relations and women's rights are negotiated inside communities.[19] Roma feminist scholars Lídia Balogh, Angéla Kóczé, and Natasha Lamoreux presented the result of their studies at the 8th International Feminist Research Conference in Budapest, Hungary in May 2012,

titled 'Liberal Multiculturalism and Roma Feminism: Building Bridges between Roma and Non-Roma Feminists.' In the paper, they articulate around the

> overlooked but critical role that Romani women and international feminist movements can play in addressing the ongoing and increasing marginalization of the Roma, as well as where we see critical gaps in the current approaches to Roma inclusion and provide recommendations for policy-makers, feminist activists and civil society workers.[20]

Balogh, Kóczé, and Lamoreux address intersectionality issues and position themselves to politically renegotiate strategic symbolic relations. They argue that features such as 'privilege' and 'credibility' in the relationship between feminists can be replaced with 'cooperation' and 'collaboration,' which are important qualities for any politics of alliance, including cross-border ones.

> We are eager to further a critical dialogue between feminists and women of all nationalities, ethnicities, class-backgrounds, ages, sexual orientations and abilities on the importance of building bridging networks of women who can help each other open political and social spaces to challenge discrimination and intolerance at its sources.[21]

Unfortunately, very few feminist theoreticians consider Gypsy women's writings and Gypsy feminism in their works.[22] Among these theoreticians we find Lidia Puigvert, whose writings on dialogic feminism are based upon the idea that western women can no longer avoid a dialogue with 'other women.' She also considers the political experience of Roma women and how they have struggled in Europe, both in homogenous groups and across different Gypsy communities, such as *Drom Kotar Mestipen*, a Barcelona-based association of Gypsy women that has been active since 1999. This group is formed by women of all ages, working on 'equality in the difference' for a 'same level dialogue' among women. Their main focus is the struggle against sexism and racism. Lidia Puigvert also refers to the experience of 'mixed groups' as feminist political formations of Gypsy and non-Gypsy that have worked together, as in the case of Romniya and independentist Catalana women.[23]

In Italy, unlike Spain, there seem to be no feminist Gypsy groups representing themselves as politically or socially active at present. Valeria Venturini[24] pointed out that Gypsy feminism does not yet have the strength to be influential – that it still lacks mass support. Yet, the existence of gender activism, open to Queer discourse, is a clear sign of change and has brought attention to relevant issues that cannot be overlooked. Romani feminism in several European communities has reshaped the feminist relationships among all women and inspired courage in young women. As Oana Marcu's research-action on Romanian Roma youth in Italy shows, the situation is changing rapidly, with an impact on everyday life and gender models.[25]

Romni is a network of Roma women based in Italy, with several partners in other countries, such as Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, Austria, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Macedonia. Coordinated by Saska Jovanovic, it was launched in 2010. In line with its slogan, *sposati quando sei pronta* ('marry when you are ready'), one of the main goals is to oppose early marriage. *Romni* gender activism focuses on issues of education, capacity building, and tools for advocacy for Roma, Sinti, and Camminanti.[26]

A successful transnational experience is represented by the International Roma Women Network,[27] whose activists are committed to raising awareness about the difficulties and prejudice Romani women face both in mainstream society and in 'traditional' Romani communities, by challenging racism and gender inequality simultaneously. The Roma Women Network is a model of intersectional feminist practice led by Romani in collaboration with non-Romani. It is a particularly useful model in terms of alliances. In the last 20 years, some Romani women activists pursued progressive women's rights politics in Central and Eastern Europe, but not all Romani gender activists call themselves feminists; some prioritize the anti-racist struggle, or ethnic pride, and would support Romani women's rights only on some specific topics. Today, Romani gender activists are in the position of articulating their issues within both the framework of women's human rights *and* global feminism.[28] At this juncture, diversity within groups and coalitions should not be seen as a lack of cohesion or as an obstacle; real internal differences are beneficial when reaching out to create alliances, to open up the spectrum of possibilities.

Educational activity is most important in associations such as Azbija Memedova of Macedonia, which mentors young women as Romani leaders. One of these, Enisa Eminova, conducted a survey of gender activism and created a directory of 135 Romani women's organizations in just eleven Central and Eastern European countries. As reported by Schultz at the 2003 Roma Women's Forum: 'Roma women are the ones who will lead the way to deep and lasting transformations in European society by challenging racism, sexism, poverty, and exclusion simultaneously.'[29]

Roma feminists and gender activists were granted recognition when they began to appear in institutions in the 1990s, as elected representatives of national parliaments in Eastern European countries. In 2004, two Roma women were elected as European Deputies. The first, Viktoria Mohacsi, confronted Italian president Berlusconi about his Romaphobia; the second, Livia Jaroka, was among the writers of the first *Resolution on Roma and Sinti women*.[30] In the summer of 2014, a Roma feminist was elected for the first time to the European Parliament. Soraya Post, a 57-year-old Roma activist, was elected to the European Parliament as a member of the Swedish Party 'Feminist Initiative' (with branches in Germany and France), earning 5.3% of the vote. While Sweden, considered a bastion of gender equality, had had a feminist political party for a decade, it was thanks to a Gypsy woman candidate that it won its first seat in Parliament.

The next chapter focuses on Roma feminism's main issues in the scholarly milieu.

Notes

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2 Piasere, Leonardo (1999), *Un mondo di mondi. Antropologia delle culture rom*, L'ancora, Napoli.
3 Jovanović, Jelena, Kóczé, Angéla and Balogh, Lídia (2015), *Intersections of Gender, Ethnicity, and Class: History and Future of the Romani Women's Movement*, Center for Policy Studies, Budapest, p. 8.
4 Jones, Helen, 'Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange', *Travellers' Times*, N. 58.
5 www.errc.org/article/declaration-of-the-international-conference-public-policies-and-romani-women-in-central-and-east-european-countries/623
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8 http://arakerandokalolepe.blogspot.it/
9 www.mona-hungary.hu/eindex.ivy
10 De Botton, Lena, Puigvert, Lídia and Sánchez-Aroca, Montse (2005), *The Inclusion of Other Women: Breaking the Silence through Dialogic Learning*, Sperling-Verlag, New York; Sordé, Teresa, Serradell, O., Puigvert, L., and Munté, A. (2013). 'Solidarity Networks that Challenge Racialized Discourses: The Case of Romani Immigrant Women in Spain', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 20, N° 4, pp. 1–16.
11 OCSE*, Women as Agent of Change in Migrant, Minority, Roma and Sinti Communities in the Osce Region. Proceedings from and Expert Roundtable*, Gender Section OCSE, Vienna, 2014.
12 Albert, Gwendolyn (2011), 'Forced Sterilization and Romani Women's Resistance in Central Europe', *Different Takes*, N° 71, pp. 1–4.
13 http://lolodiklo.blogspot.it/2012/10/declaration-of-romani-sinti-and.html
14 www.osce.org/odihr/94410?download=true
15 www.osce.org/odihr/158801
16 https://it-it.facebook.com/fakaligitanas
17 Pizzo, Anna (2013), 'Carmen o Esmeralda? Le origini del nuovo femminismo Rom', *Donne Rom. Condizione femminile, diritti umani e non discriminazione*, Unar, Istiss, Roma, p. 121.
18 For some African feminists, during colonial times of deportation, traditional practices of female genital modification became what was at a certain point defined as 'radical circumcision' (i.e., included clitoridectomy). One of the explanations of such a process is that it was initiated because of the cultural belief that pleasure and orgasm were related to the capacity to conceive. This practice was performed by the women of the community in order to prevent their daughters becoming pregnant by the colonizers, who kidnapped them for both productive and reproductive work (Rashida Ismaili Abu Bakr, personal communication).
19 Illisei, Irina (2013), 'Education of Roma Women between Feminism and Multiculturalism. A Study Case: Roma Women in Romania', *Journal of Social Science Education*, Vol. 12, N° 1, pp. 67–74. Available from: www.jsse.org/index.php/jsse/article/viewFile/74/1168.
20 Lídia, Balogh, Angéla, Kóczé, and Natasha, Lamoreux (2012), 'Liberal Multiculturalism and Roma Feminism: Building Bridges between Roma and Non-Roma

Feminists', paper presented at the *8th International Feminist Research Conference*, Budapest.

21 Ibid.

22 See 'Twenty Gypsy Women You Should Be Reading' www.vidaweb.org/twenty-Gypsy-women-you-should-be-reading/. White women academics' neglect of Gypsy feminist writing and struggles is not surprising, but follows the bad habit of social sciences with relating to knowledge produced in the margins – whether the global South or internal liminal spaces (Connell and Corradi 2014). As Margareta Matache pointed out, 'Romani literature has remained invisible in broader social and political theory, culture and race studies. And while more and more scholars are studying Romani realities, there are few who, in Bourdieu's words, call into question the "intellectual world" which has perpetuated presumptuous, racialized or biased modes of thought about Roma. Nevertheless, an emerging, more critical variety of Romani studies has slowly begun to question the standard brand of Romani discourse, built as it happens, on a foundation of difference, inferiority and subordination' (Matache 2016).

23 De Botton, Lena, Puigvert, Lídia and Sánchez-Aroca, Montse (2005), *The Inclusion of Other Women: Breaking the Silence through Dialogic Learning*, Sperling-Verlag, New York.

24 Venturini, Valeria (2012), 'Status di discriminazione multipla delle donne Rom in Europa', Montecchiari Valentina, Guerrini Martina and Venturini Valeria ed, with Centro Mondialità e Sviluppo Reciproco di Livorno, *RomAntica cultura, invisibilità ed esclusione del popolo Rom*, Briciole, Cesvot (Centro Servizi Volontariato Toscana), pp. 95–96.

25 Marcu, Oana (2014), *Malizie di strada. Una ricerca azione con giovani rom romeni migranti*, Milan.

26 www.ternibori.org/it/chi-siamo/partner-italia-romni/

27 www.advocacynet.org/partners/women/international-roma-womens-network/

28 Schultz, Debra L. (2012), 'Translating Intersectionality Theory into Practice: A Tale of Romani- Gadže Feminist Alliance'*, Signs*, Vol. 38, N° 1, pp. 37–38.

29 Ibid, p. 39.

30 www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P8-TA-2015-0095

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3 A focus on Romani feminism

We are strong women,
and often we are left without voices
in both the Romani movement
and the feminist movement.

(Ethel Brooks 2012, p. 2)

In this section, two collective publications are analyzed, both regarding Romani feminisms. The second is exercising community leadership through good practices, action-research, and theoretical contributions. These works are very inspirational and can be beneficial for Romani, Gypsies, and Travellers, the feminist milieu, and activists in general. The first publication, *The Symposium on Romani Feminism*, already represents a milestone; the second one is a more recent reflection in *Analize: Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies*. The aim of this chapter is to outline concepts and topics of the current debate that need to be known and appreciated.

A special issue of the journal *Sings* was devoted to a Symposium on Romani feminism in 2012. It was the first publication of this type geared to an international audience. Various themes were discussed and several lines of debate identified. Some were new, others were well known in the global feminist arena. As also happened to black feminists, Romnya are asked to make a choice between racial/ethnic struggle and liberation as women.

On this subject, Ethel Brooks narrates an anecdote whose protagonist was a white woman who reacted to the idea of a Romani feminist, publicly challenging her with the claim that patriarchy is so intertwined in Romani culture that to define herself as a feminist, Brooks should have given up her ethnic identity, i.e., her pride in belonging to the Roma people.[1] Here we should highlight the racist flavor of statements that view patriarchy as a permanent feature of marginalized communities. This view regards women of the specific ethnic group as helpless and inferior human beings, unable to deal with their own oppression.

Brooks refers to Islamic feminists and their capacity of combining identities and struggles. A relevant line of debate in the Symposium on Romani

Feminism is the theoretical and political knot of nationalisms. Roma women speak many languages and negotiate different relations and forms of belonging to nation-states. Too often, they live 'in the interstice'; they belong to diverse geographical locations, cultures, and religions, and engage at different levels with feminist activism and ethnic struggles for recognition and social rights. Ethel Brooks' analysis deeply connects with African American feminism, subaltern studies, and the work of Gayatri Spivak.[2] In such a theoretical frame, Romani people are represented as 'quintessentially cosmopolitan, immersed within multiple cultural formations.'[3]

Another passionate area of discussion regards networks of activism, friendship, and solidarity among Romani women and between Romani and non-Romani women, wherein Brooks is struck by 'the presence of racism among European feminists.'[4]

A *double consciousness* appears in the struggles for what is referred to as 'post-Auschwitz sexuality,'[5] which for Romani women means facing up to the trauma of forced sterilization[6] and genocidal politics, even as the struggle against all the different forms of (racial/gendered) persecution goes on to this day.

Authors in the Symposium on Romani Feminism addressed issues of power and agency, emphasizing how feminism has been central in promoting personal and social change. Friendships and solidarity among activists and scholars, across national boundaries and ethnicities, are key factors in enhancing feminism across boundaries. The body as a social construct was one of the main topics of the Symposium, starting from the criticism of the 'dirty Gypsy trope.' It may be interesting to notice how the subaltern groups are often the subject of analogies, sarcasm, and processes of 'Othering' that include undesirability. Unpleasantness, uncleanliness, and immorality are the qualities attributed to those who are poor or belong to an 'inferior' race or cast. *They* are always distasteful, less than human, of animal-like status. The same process has happened to dispossessed indigenous populations, African slaves, Jews, Polish and Italian immigrants,[7] and other inferiorized ethnic minorities, who are referred to as rats, parasites, and cockroaches. Their very existence was considered repugnant, offensive, odious. As Arundhati Roy has pointed out, from the Armenian people in Turkey to the resisting peasants in India, entomological metaphors have been used to mark difference, from calls to 'clean-up' or 'disinfest' their places, to 'eradicate' their presence, or to somehow annihilate or suppress them.[8]

Brooks articulates Alexandra Oprea's[9] focus on the racialized embodiment of the 'visual, olfactory, auditory' dimensions of everyday life, finding a corporeal centrality both in discriminatory practices and in oppositional politics.[10] The theoretical perspective of placing the body at the center of political and social discourses is agreeable indeed, promoting reflection upon the body as a place of consciousness and resistance.[11] Despite the problematic norms and representations historically surrounding bodily expressions in white cultures and monotheistic religions, the Gypsy corporeity appears to be less colonized. For Gypsy women, sensuality is celebrated on special occasions and under

certain circumstances, and sexual pleasure (within marriage) is considered a natural right. Rather than being sinful, sex is an expression of a couple's unity. Traditions of inhibition, guilt, or prohibition are alien.[12]

Debra Schultz recognized how Gypsy feminists had to face the accusation of being divisive, since they are consciously breaking 'a taboo common to marginalized groups: never criticize your own people to the dominant society.'[13]

A new gender awareness mingles with old aspects of matriarchy, finding different expression in everyday life situations. Petra Gelbart criticizes white feminist interpretations of traditions and gender roles while narrating accounts of her mother and grandmother's matriarchal attitudes. She puts it in plain and vigorous words: 'As with beauty pageants or sexualized and self-sexualizing female musicians, there is more to this cultural matrix than any single theory or form of activism can readily sort out.'[14] Things are changing, and today women in different communities are questioning heterosexism and the imposition of a biological destiny; it should be understood they 'refuse to be constrained by the traditional heteronormativity in Romani or other communities.'[15]

From the Symposium emerges the idea of a Romani feminist political discourse useful to all activists and feminists to decolonize the present debate from biases and stereotypical ideas about all Gypsy women, regardless of the specific community they belong to, the type of oppositional consciousness displayed, and gender politics enacted. Three years after the Comparative Symposium on Romani Feminism was published, the necessity of promoting a Romani feminism with endogenous roots in the communities of Europe was discussed by Romani feminists gathered at the meeting Pre Drom: Forwarding the Positions of Roma Women in Politics – Romnia Feminism in the Making. The gathering was held at the European Parliament, Brussels, on November 18 and 19, 2015. As the African American lesbian poet bell hooks would comment, important steps are being made from the margins to the center.[16]

In 2016, a new series of *Analize: Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies* offered a single issue devoted to 'Envisioning Roma Feminism.' All the essays discuss crucial topics in a compelling way and have a strong intersectional approach, from a Roma feminist perspective. In the editorial, Carmen Gheorghe points out the 'scarcity of feminist research to re-shape Roma women as subjects of research' (2016, p. 5) and highlights the necessity of having more Roma women in academia and as researchers in communities.

One of the contributors, Ildikó Asztalos Morell from the Uppsala Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, intersectionally analyzes different forms of bottom-up political actions, networks, and models of leadership in Hungary. She criticizes the different ways in which NGOs 'fill black spots left unaddressed by the retrenching post-socialist neoliberal/conservative welfare state.' These organizations usually 'act within the context of dominant discursive frames' when addressing the situations of Roma women. Morell underlines that in this context, Hungarian women's organizations are described as representing a 'mixture of hybrid feminism and anti-feminism,' and that Roma women's organizations 'are not exempt from this description' (p. 13). The

political dynamics of collaboration and alliances among different groups are discussed, in particular

> merging points between radical feminist organizations, such as NANE and Roma women's organizations, such as Szinesgyöngyök, where interplay between radical feminist organizations and Roma women's organizations have created fruitful ground for enlarging the concerns of Roma women's organizations, by taking GBV [gender based violence] issues on board, despite initial opposition from Roma organizations and their own constituency.
>
> (Morell 2016, p. 14)

Two contributions in *Analize* clearly outline the situation of Roma feminism in Romania. The first, by Enikő Vincze from Babes-Bolyai University, looks at the racialization of Roma and the political potential of women, who have great tasks to accomplish in a particularly hostile situation. She shows how inclusion itself became depoliticized in Romania:

> Ironically, Roma women's status within their own communities was addressed first by the (otherwise patriarchal) mainstream public discourse in a false feminist tone, which was seemingly deeply concerned about their subordination to community norms regarding early marriage and childbirth. This was and remains a challenge that Roma feminists are still faced with – protecting women's and children's rights within their own communities while deconstructing the way in which such mainstream positions reproduce convictions according to which Roma are an 'inferior race' performing pre-modern/primitive practices of life.
>
> (Vincze, p. 64)

Diana Elena Neaga offers a perspective on gender activism in Romania, where feminism is still 'a fragile force' and the risk of assimilation is high, because of the 'position of impossibility' that Roma women find themselves in – the triple oppression of race, gender, and severe poverty. Such a situation tends toward hiding of ethnic identity and accepting a 'patriarchal ethnic construction.' Neaga points out that most women believe

> gender identity must be subordinated to ethnic identity. Even though feminist activism is not equivalent with the loss of ethnic identity, such an attitude puts Roma women in a position to choose between personal autonomy and, many times, the severing of ties with their families and communities.
>
> (Neaga 2016, p. 31)

Women are usually valued in their traditional roles, as keepers of families, memories, and cultural values, as caregivers and educators, but this happens at the price of their freedom.

Neaga refers to Uma Narayan's work *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, in which she criticizes

> at the theoretical level the cultural relativism that opens the way to intra-community abuse posing as the valorization of 'authenticity,' saying that the latter should not mean lack of criticism or change, that it is important to understand that the women's aspirations to equal treatment are indigenous to any culture.

Neaga argues, however, that

> things are very different in practice and subtle theoretical arguments are hard to internalize especially by those who are forced to change and even more so when change means the loss of a position of power. Perhaps the best example is one given by Alexandra Oprea. Her subject was Nicoleta Bițu, one of the most visible Roma feminist women in Romania. Alexandra Oprea said: 'I remember many conversations during which the "Romaness" of activist Nicoleta Bițu was questioned by the "Căldărari" Roma during her efforts to fight gender oppression in Roma communities. Mrs. Bițu is not a "Căldărar" Roma. She's part of a Roma group that is seen as less "traditional". Her husband, Dr. Nicolae Gheorghe, also belongs to the less traditional Roma circles, but he is accused less often of being "gadjikanime" than his feminist wife because he does not engage on a regular basis in activities that criticize the internal practices.'
>
> (Neaga 2016, p. 31–32)

A self-destructive gender–ethnic antagonism can be overcome in 'the feminist discourse based on intersectionality, which has been conceptualized in various ways by Romani women activists,' according to Neaga. She reports Raluca Maria Popa's words:

> the novelty of the language of intersectionality is perhaps the renewed sense of hopefulness with which it is spoken by scholars and activists alike. Many of them feel that intersectionality provides an alternative to the homogenizing pressures of identity politics, but also an alternative to 'assimilationist universalistic politics.' In other words, intersectionality is neither an essentializing 'politics of difference,' nor a 'politics of universalism' that assimilates differences within categories patterned on the experiences of privileged groups.
>
> (Neaga 2016, p. 33)

Perhaps the most innovative work published in this single issue of *Analize* is the feminist reading of slavery by Mihai Lukacs, who draws a suggestive and poignant parallel between the centuries of slavery in Kalechia and Moldova and those in North America, which link the experience of Roma people with

the one of African Americans – and, I would add, Native Americans. Using an intersectional approach, she focuses on the slavery of Roma people in Romania and the abolitionist movement from a gender perspective. I will take some extra space for a full consideration of her work, given its rarity as feminist readings of Roma slavery.

Lukacs analyzes the sexual division of labor, with women being employed as domestic slave workers. She effectively finds the roots of contemporary stereotypes regarding Roma women in slavery and post-slavery times:

> slavery offered the context for a particular way in which women were perceived by men: if Gadje womanhood was idealized as we can see in Romantic literature and art of the nineteenth century, the negative stereotypes of womanhood were displaced by Gadje men onto Roma women, a symbolic devaluation of non-Gadje femininity that continued until today. This conditioning of perception, produced during slavery, affected Gadje people of noble or modest social positioning but also the Roma slave sub-culture, which was internalizing Gadje ideas about Roma women, for an illusory acceptance and inclusion into the Gadje world. The systematic devaluation of Roma womanhood was not a simple form of proto-antiGypsyism, but a complex and calculated mechanism of social control and inequality.
>
> (Lukacs 2016, p. 68)

During the abolitionist historical phase, the marginalization of women and the absence of recognition recalls what happens in other liberation movements. As Lukacs posits,

> Reading the Roma slavery abolitionist literature, one can observe the lack of women politicians, writers or campaigners being directly involved in the struggle for the liberation of the Roma slaves in the nineteenth century Romanian principalities. Nevertheless, women without a name are present in this literature as elements in the development of the movement.
>
> (Lukacs 2016, p. 69)

The price of freedom from slavery was a process of amalgamation within the Romanian society, what has been called in many circumstances 'integration' – a term with an 'integralist' edge, meaning the absorption of an alien entity in a context by keeping the latter *integer*, the same as before. The external element needs to make all the adjustments and adaptations without spoiling the integrity of the incorporating environment. The abolition of slavery implied

> assimilation into Romanian society, a mandatory but artificial feeling of belonging, which was not easily inserted into the Roma identity, started during the period of abolition of slavery, as a required condition for being a free person. In order to be perceived as a non-slave, Roma people had to renounce their language, way of dress and identity. This idea of

> Romanianization as part of the process of slavery abolitionism was not thoroughly implemented by the authorities; in many situations the authorities were overwhelmed by the new conditions which were so foreign to them. Another material effect of slavery abolition was the massive migration of liberated slaves to the West.
>
> (Lukacs, p. 73)

The difficulties of relating with Gadje anti-abolitionists, also women, is mentioned. Because of their located knowledge, whites do not easily see connections between their privileges (and the privileges of their ancestors) with the underprivileged situation in which Roma communities live, including the persistence of early marriage, which whites everywhere tend to consider a 'tradition' of backward communities. The need to decolonize categories and concepts strongly emerges from the reading of this essay.

> Early marriage is an interesting case of perception: through its connection to Roma slavery, it can bring us back the unfinished practice of emancipation as it was exercised by non-Roma abolitionists: as a process of extraction from barbarism of a population morally underdeveloped which has to be forcefully Romanianized, to abandon its language and culture, to be assimilated by the larger Gadje population. We have to keep in mind that as during slavery, Roma nation is a cultural construction of the media of the time, the state and its bureaucrats (even if we talk about researchers, sociologists or Roma representatives), a moral construction that can be quite far from reality. This perception is also influenced by the isolation of Roma people from society, the lack of their valorization and promotion, the blockage of their participation in society.
>
> (Lukacs, p. 72)

To conclude her essay, the author offers an outstanding feminist reading of a novel having a patriarch slave owner and an adolescent Roma slave as protagonists.

> In what was praised as the very first social novella, Vasile Alecsandri's popular 'History of a Gulden', the Roma woman is presented as the quintessential slave who is completely available to the non-Roma noble (in this case, a noble Dutch who tells the story): 'what measured and agile figures one can find between their (Gypsy) women'; 'since I am in the Romanian principalities, I have never found such dainty, so well jointed and, in one word, so agreeable features such as those of Zamfira.' The unspeaking character of the novella, the Roma slave Zamfira, is only sixteen, having, as Alecsandri, a slave owner himself, writes, 'that childish freshness so priceless in the adornment of a woman, but then all her movements, her looks, her voice had something special, an air of charming wilderness, which would make her similar to an agile deer at the moment of feeling the

> presence of the hunter in the forest.' Her objectification is completed in the description of the novella in images such as: 'her raven hair was braided with silver coins and flowers; she was wearing a choker made of red and white beads and rubles, which was bouncing on her breast at each step, creating a delicate clatter and distinct beaming under the rays of the sun'.
>
> (Lukacs, p. 75)

Exotification and sexualization of the subaltern woman is quite common, especially in colonial literature, where the sexual abuse of the colonized child, belonging to a servant or a slave family, marks his/her life as a subaltern or a fugitive or a juvenile. In this novel, we understand a multiple dominant perspective, since the male protagonist and narrator is also a non-slave, rich, and noble character, who can be represented in an intersectional approach in terms of gender, age, race, and also status, class, and cast. By looking at these six axes of power differentials, we can realize how improper it is to present the tale as a love story; love should happen between two persons both possessed of free will, yet the romance depicts a top-down relationship between viewer and viewed, the observer and the 'object' of the gaze. All this mystifies sentiments and represents a normative way of indicating a false escape from a situation of oppression and sufferance – this indecent rhetoric suggests the slave has a choice in loving her oppressor, that there is an alternative to the chain and the pain, which are actually just two sides of the same coin.

The editorial project 'Envisioning Roma Feminism' in the journal *Analyze* is brought to a close with Abla Hasan's contribution of an Islamic feminist viewpoint; a reflection on Gypsy economy by Elena Popa, who reviews an anthology with a vast spectrum of interests from Roma to Ciganos; and Julia Hasdeu's essay with a non-Roma perspective for building bridges with post-colonial and intersectional theories. The focus on the necessity to bring power relations and emotion into the scholarly and feminist political discourse is a crucial topic we will encounter again further ahead.

Notes

1 Brooks, C. Ethel (2012), 'The Possibilities of Romani Feminism', *Signs*, Vol. 38, N° 1, p. 2.
2 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988b), 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Grossberg Laurence, University of Illinois Press, Urbana-Champaign, p. 297.
3 Brooks, C. Ethel (2012), p. 4.
4 Biţu, Nicoleta and Vincze, Enikő (2012), 'Personal Encounters and Parallel Paths toward Romani Feminism', *Signs*, Vol. 38, N° 1, p. 46.
5 Brooks, C. Ethel (2007), *Sociology Confronts the Holocaust: Memories and Identities in Jewish Diasporas*, ed. by Gerson Judith and Wolf L. Diane, Duke University Press, Durham, p. 28.
6 Albert, Gwendolyn (2011), 'Forced Sterilization and Romani Women's Resistance in Central Europe', *Different Takes*, N° 71, pp. 1–4.

7 Guglielmo, Jennifer and Salerno, Salvatore, ed. (2003), *Are Italians White?* Routledge, London.
8 Roy, Arundhati (2008), 'Listening to Grasshoppers: Genocide, Denial and Celebration', A lecture in Istanbul to commemorate the first anniversary of the assassination of Hrant Dink, Editor of the Turkish Armenian paper, Agos. Available from: www.hrantdink.org/picture_library/arundhati-2008-eng.pdf
9 Oprea, Alexandra (2003), *The Erasure of Romani Women in Statistical Data: Limits of the Race-versus-Gender Approach*, Open Society Institute, New York. Available from: www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/roma-data-20030403.pdf
10 Brooks, C. Ethel (2012), p. 7.
11 Corradi, Laura (2004), *Nuove Amazzoni. La lotta delle donne contro il cancro al seno*, Derive Approdi, Roma; Malignant profit: the debate on genetics and environmental causes of cancer among scientists, women survivors and people of color (Ph. D. Dissertation), University of California, Santa Cruz, 1995.
12 Corradi, Laura (2013), 'Femminismo, post-colonialità e metodo intersezionale nelle narrazioni Romnì e nella prevenzione della violenza di genere', *Donne Rom. Condizione femminile, diritti umani e non discriminazione*, Unar, Istiss, Roma, pp. 7–38.
13 Schultz, Debra L. (2012), 'Translating Intersectionality Theory into Practice: A Tale of Romani-Gadže Feminist Alliance', *Signs*, Vol. 38, N° 1, p. 37.
14 Gelpart, Petra (2012), 'Either Sing or Go Get the Beer: Contradictions of (Romani) Female Power in Central Europe', *Signs*, Vol. 38, N° 1, p. 28.
15 Ibid.
16 hooks, bell (2000), 'Racism and Feminism, the Issue of Accountability', in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, ed. by Les Back and John Solomos, Routledge, New York, pp. 373–388.

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4 Decolonizing feminist theory and research

The word 'research'
is probably one of the dirtiest words
in the indigenous world's dictionary.

(Linda Tuhiwae Smith 1999, p. 1)

As Maori sociologist Linda Tuhiwae Smith teaches us, the production of scholarly understanding, education, and research praxis worldwide is still largely marked by European priorities and values born during the Enlightenment. A deeply embodied notion of science and rationality as superior forms of knowledge, versus experience and intuition, can be seen at the basis of Euro-Atlantic idea of supremacy. The persistence of Western hegemony finds its roots in a binary hierarchical construct which separated the colonizers and the colonized, Whites and non-whites, rulers and subalterns, and, within these categories, males and females. While the old colonialism was defeated by insurgent populations all over the world, economic and cultural neo-colonialism pervaded social relations, re-enslaving people as consumers, penetrating communities and dictating the way to be and how to live. In educational institutions, research methodologies and goals are still mostly hetero-directed by the flow of financing money. In the last decades, there has been an increasing awareness amongst scholar–activists about the need to decolonize knowledge and research. Feminist theory, research, and relations also need to be 'decolonized.'[1]

As mentioned before, the use of the word 'feminism' is debated by Gypsy women, as it is by other women of color, and by indigenous, aboriginal, and Maori women. What is considered a feminist issue or struggle changes remarkably in accordance to cultural context. One could speculate about the differences between gender activists and feminists, or when it is appropriate to talk about a feminist movement or a women's movement in the socially, geographically, and politically diverse Gypsy context. As a matter of fact, while some gender activists and women leaders define themselves as feminist, others dislike the expression 'feminism,' which may appear threatening or antagonistic to men and women of the same community. Feminism is perceived by some

gender activists as historically related to the white women's legacy and lexicon; in the past, the term implied the risk of an over-imposition of an exogenous agenda.

All over the world feminists of color have produced numerous studies attempting to decolonize and re-signify feminism.[2] Such contributions are often combined with the idea of self-reflection and the need for a knowledge that is not the product of a relationship of domination. Decolonization may suggest a path or tool for cultural liberation for scholars and communities of color. The 'de-colonial option' was proposed by Walter Mignolo and others in the milieu of Latin-American studies criticizing the Eurocentric concept of 'modernity.' Decoloniality represents a challenge to persistent gendered and racialized stratifications, produced during and *after* the colonial era, since the *coloniality of power survives colonialism itself*, as in Annibal Quijano's theory.[3] Against the colonial 'matrix of power,' the *opcion descolonial* is a theoretical and practical radical approach, requiring 'epistemic disobedience' to Eurocentrism within academia and in society at large, through forms of de-learning (of the imposed education) and construction of different types of knowledge. Such a process implies an individual and collective de-linking from mainstream theory and methodology; finding space inside, and growing apart from, academic institutions. I believe the rescue of traditional forms of teaching, non-dichotomous ways of learning, wisdom, and intelligence are part of this process.

One of the main goals for Gypsy feminists and gender activists is to keep a dynamic connection between *valorization of traditions* and *self-determination of women*. The same aim informed the action of Mayan women in Chiapas, Mexico; they established a revolutionary women's law, the Ley Revolutionaria de Mujereres, in the aftermath of the 1994 insurrection. In that occasion, women of the indigenous Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) collectively reflected upon their own culture in a gendered way.[4] During a self-managed referendum, the insurgent women asked themselves crucial questions, such as: 'what do we like, and what do we dislike, about our indigenous culture?' and 'which Mayan traditions do we want to keep, and what do we want to overcome?' Listening to women's voices became a way to improve direct democracy, and their decisions were implemented (e.g., the ban on alcohol on indigenous lands). A powerful agency of the Zapatista women turned out to be a positive way to overcome both cultural relativism (which often supports the patriarchal order in the name of respect for traditions) and white supremacist affirmation of universal values, accompanied by a neo-colonial political attitude, often unreflectively reproduced by western activists. The same can be said about Kurdish feminism[5] and other 'ethnic feminisms,' all of which struggle for the re-articulation of culture and feminism in a fruitful relationship.[6]

The relationship between rights and culture is at the basis of a feminist Roma magazine, *Nevi Sara Kali*, first issued in 2009, in Romania. The name of the journal refers to the 'Merciless Kali' – Goddess of pure feminine

strength – covered by a Sara veil, recalling the cultural setting. According to Maria Angelillo, during the first Roma World Congress in London 1971, sponsored by the Indian government, 'Saint Sara Kali' was recognized as protector of the Roma.[7] Issued in three languages, including English, and with an international board, the publication offered ideas, opinions, data, and investigations and aimed to highlight Romani/Gypsy feminist networks, accepting the 'challenge of intersectionality' to actively contrast patriarchy and racism.

The decolonizing approach proposed by Mignolo and Quijano is much needed in the social sciences. Roma families and relations are changing in European countries, in their distinct forms and choices of cultural contaminations. But prejudices about Gypsies are more difficult to change – for example, public opinion still believes *forced marriage* is prevalent, while it is a residual of the past. We do not know how frequent such a patriarchal custom is. Forced marriage indicates strong family agreements implying an impossibility for the daughter to choose her husband. Differently, *arranged marriage* may be considered a tradition, widespread also in non-Roma cultures. The family proposes a candidate and the girl can approve or disapprove. In this case, she has a choice.[8] After clarifying the difference between forced and arranged marriage, which are often conflated in media and public discourse, I wish to point out how the second one does not represent complete freedom but merely a right of veto in a context where social pressures toward marriage at a young age are still strong.[9]

Yet things are changing. Very often these days, teenagers choose to enact a sort of 'elopement' or 'short runaway,' usually just for one night. Such an action does not necessarily imply the loss of virginity for the girl;[10] in some cases, the young couple chooses a family of relatives to sleep with. However, the 'elopement' represents a severe stain on the girl's reputation, necessitating reparations. The candidate groom's family is disillusioned and the bride's family must face a *fait accompli*. Everybody will be eager to facilitate a 'reparatory marriage' between the girl and the boy she has chosen, as opposed to pursuing marriage agreements without her consent.

Researchers and activists committed to contrasting early marriage encourage girls to attend and complete intermediate education, delay marriage, and increase the possibility of completing a high school education and perhaps going beyond. Raising the level of education is usually regarded as a first step for empowerment and boosting girls' self-esteem inside and outside the community. *Formal education should be problematized in a de-colonial way*, because we are talking about the same cultural institutions that have been perpetrating the inferiorization of Gypsies for centuries. Family size is also changing; the burden of family is already declining across Europe. Unfortunately, contraception seems to be less frequent in countries like Italy, in part due to religious influences. As a consequence, abortion has become common, despite the sense of guilt associated with voluntary interruption of pregnancy, and the persistence of the rhetoric of 'giving birth to as many children as the Lord will send you.'[11]

A decolonizing and intersectional approach among social workers, educators, health operators, and public administrators is crucial for shedding light on several phenomena pertaining to Gypsies that are commonly attributed to 'ethnic difference' but which are mostly class-related, such as begging, petty crime, and lack of hygiene. More than 20 years ago, Liegeois and Gheorghe had already addressed the issue of institutions and organizations in their report *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority*, revealing some confusion between ethnic *identities* and the *social problems* they face. I would add to the debate a reflection about how ethnic boundaries and identities themselves are *fluid*; they change through history and depend upon political, economic, and social factors. The ethnicization of poverty still remains a *blame the victim* argument: by explaining marginality with culture and culture with marginality, a deceitful tautology takes place (Corradi 2007).

In the Gadje discourse, class issues get *ethnicized* when it comes to Gypsies. The same happens to gender problems. For example, the tradition of exposing the sheets after marriage as a proof of the bride's virginity is represented as specific to Roma culture, whereas it was a patriarchal tradition in many societies. More controversial are practices such as the 'ritual of pañuelo'[12] among Gypsies in Spain. A study carried out by Paula Montañés Álvarez mentions how an *ajuntaora* (a woman who has the role and the authority to perform such a task in the community) will deflower the soon-to-be bride in the presence of all the other women of both families.[13] While reasserting a feminist critique for the aspects of coercion, humiliation, and control of women's bodies, such a ritual could be re-signified as a way of alleviating some of the pain and anxiety of the first night of marriage.[14] Virginity rituals are complex and different in each Roma community, and attitudes around them may vary significantly. As reported by Silverman, a Gitana in her 40s stated in an interview:

> It is oppressive. I have mixed feelings. I had to do it. (. . .) But if we expect these girls to stay in the culture and in the community, then yes. It is still very important in this community. When I was growing up, I was against it.[15]

Gypsy feminisms often need to negotiate such contradictions in a courageous way, taking into account pride in culture and the double level of communication inside and outside the community – a challenge that is similar to the struggles of indigenous and aboriginal women. These political forms of 'ethnic' feminist action are based on empowerment and resilience, and may not be as spectacular as the massive public mobilizations enacted in the past decades by white women, and in former colonies in South America and Africa. Yet, Gypsy women do not shy away from public demonstrations. They organized a protest in Bucharest against the Romaphobic statements of the Romanian President, Traian Basescu. Romani women rallied wearing T-shirts with the provocative phrase *Tganca Imputita*! (literally, 'stinky female Gypsy') and forced him to

offer formal apologies.[16] By re-appropriating a despotic signifier – in this case the trope of the 'dirty Gypsy' – a rightful rage was expressed by women against this outburst of state racism and sexism.

Notes

1 Wilson, Carla (2001), 'Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples', *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, N° 17; Guerrini, Martina (2012), 'Pratiche di dis-identità. La discriminazione sessista contro le donne romnì in una prospettiva anticolonialista', in *RomAntica cultura. Invisibilità ed esclusione del popolo Rom*, ed. by Montecchiari Valentina, Guerrini Martina and Venturini Valeria, Centro Mondialità e Sviluppo Reciproco, Cesvot (Centro Servizi Volontariato Toscana), Livorno, pp. 73–88.

2 Davis, Angela (1981), *Women, Race, & Class*, Random House, New York; Crenshaw, Kimberle (1989), 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex. A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 1, N°8, pp. 139–167; Crenshaw, Kimberle (1991), 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, Vol.43, N° 6, pp. 1241–1299; Hill, Collins Patricia (1990), *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge, New York; Hurtado, Aída (1989), 'Reflections on White Feminism: A Perspective from a Woman of Color', in *Social and Gender Boundaries in the United States*, ed. by S. Chan and J. Currie, Edwin Mellen Press, Queenston – New York; Yuval-Davis, Nira (2006), 'Intersectionality and Feminist Politics', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 13, N° 3, pp. 193–209; Yuval-Davis, Nira (2012), *The Politics of Belonging. Intersectional Contestations*, University of East London, London; Corradi, Laura (2001), 'Feminism of Color Challenges White Sociological Theory and Color-Blind Eco-Feminism', in *An International Feminist Challenge to Theory (Advances in Gender Research)*, ed. by Vasilikie Demos and Marcia Texler Segal, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Vol. 5, pp. 41–50; Corradi, Laura (1997), 'Italian Women. Women of Color', *Med Mediterranean Media*, Vol. 4, N° 4, pp. 27–30; Bidaseca, Karina and Vazquez, Laba Vanesa (2011), *Feminismos y poscolonialidad. Descolonizando el feminismos desde y en América Latina*, Ediciones Godot, Buenos Aires; Castillo, Aida Hernandez (2002), 'Zapatismo and the Emergence of Indigenous Feminism', *Nacla Report on the Americas*, Vol. 35, N° 6; Lugones, María and others, ed. (2008), *Género y descolonialidad*, Ediciones del Signo and Globalization and the Humanities Project, Duke University, Durham.

3 Mignolo, Walter (2011), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Duke University Press, Durham, pp. 122–123; Mignolo, Walter (2008), 'La opción de-colonial. Desprendimiento y Apertura. Un Manifiesto y un caso', in *Tabula Rasa. Revista de Humanidades*, Vol. 8, ed. by Cairo Heriberto, Universidad Colegio Mayor de Cundinamarca, Bogotà, pp. 243–281; Mignolo, Walter (2000), '(Post)Occidentalism, (Post)Coloniality, and (Post)Subaltern Rationality', in *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, Duke University Press, Durham, pp. 86–118; Mignolo, Walter (2007), 'Delinking', *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 21, N° 2–3, pp. 449–514; Quijano, Aníbal (2000), 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology*, Vol. 15, N° 2, pp. 217–234; Quijano, Aníbal (2007), 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies,* Vol. 21, N° 2–3, pp. 168–178.

4 Castillo, Aida Hernandez (2002), 'Zapatismo and the Emergence of Indigenous Feminism', *Nacla Report on the Americas*, Vol. 35, N° 6.
5 On Kurdish feminism and jineology see: www.kurdistanfeministparty.com/en/; Öcalan, Abdullah (2016), *Scritti dal carcere. Oltre lo Stato, il potere e la violenza* [*Bir Halkı Savunmak]*, Lavo Simona trans. by, Edizioni Punto Rosso, Milano.
6 Sáenz, Charlotte Maria (2017), 'Other Worlds, Women Up in Arms: Zapatista and Rojava Kurds Embrace a New Gender Politics'. Available from: www.huffington post.com/beverly-bell/women-up-in-arms-zapatist_b_6891494.html
7 Angelillo, Maria (2012), 'Censire l'esistente per creare il reale. L'origine Indiana e la costruzione dei "rrom"', *Altre modernità/Otras modernidades/Autres modernités/Other modernities*, N° 8, Università di Milano, Milan, p. 159. Saint Sara Kali's remains are said to be kept in the *Reliquiarum* of the Church Les Saintes Maries del la Mer in Camargue, France, where every year two Gypsy Madonnas are jointly worshipped by the different communities. In the same occasion, April 8 was identified as the international Roma day, the blue and green flag with the red wheel was adopted as the official flag, and the chant 'Upre Roma' as the national hymn.
8 Traditional marriage agreements in western countries still survive in the upper classes. On this matter, our societies present a double standard: in the highly privileged contexts of nobility and kingdoms most criticisms are left aside. In a recent biography, Prince Charles of England tells the story of his forced marriage with Lady Diane: even though his relationship with Camille was known to everybody, the royal family forced him to marry a virgin of high descent. Only after the tragic death of his wife could he emancipate himself and, in contrast with his status expectations, choose the woman of his life. Even if things might have changed *de facto* in the last generation, virginity still goes un-discussed as a requirement for girls before marriage in the nobility system. I am not aware of anthropological studies or sociological debates about such forms of controls, mandatory gynecological checks for princesses, duchesses, countesses, and little marquises – while there is literature about virginity controls and rituals in Gypsy communities.
9 According to the data produced by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2008–2012) around 2% of Romani girls aged 10–15 were 'traditionally married' or cohabiting with a partner, while approximately 16% of Roma boys and girls aged 16–17 years were also married or living with a partner – as reported in a study by Roma feminist scholars. Jovanović, Jelena, Kóczé, Angéla and Balogh, Lídia (2015), *Intersections of Gender, Ethnicity, and Class: History and Future of the Romani Women's Movement*, Center for Policy studies, Budapest.
10 In Oana Marcu's book, the love runaway (or 'fake kidnapping') is not considered as a tradition but a 'largely diffused custom', a tolerated transgression of the rules. In her research, findings show how 'the girl should lose her virginity, during the escape, otherwise her parents can get her back and prevent her from running away again' (my translation). Marcu, Oana (2014), *Malizie di strada. Una ricerca azione con giovani rom romeni migranti*, Milano, p. 137.
11 Spinelli, Marisa (1985), 'Me sinjum Romrì', Lacio Drom, Centro Studi Zingari, Vol. 21, N° 3, pp. 6–12; Corradi, Laura (2013), 'Femminismo, post-colonialità e metodo intersezionale nelle narrazioni Romnì e nella prevenzione della violenza di genere', *Donne Rom. Condizione femminile, diritti umani e non discriminazione*, Unar, Istiss, Roma, pp. 7–38.
12 The pañuelo is a small piece of fabric.
13 Montañés, Álvarez Paula (2011), 'Una aproximacion a la realidad de las mujeres gitanas desde la perspectiva de genero', *Acciones e Investigaciones Sociales*, pp. 87–104.

14 The pañuelo ritual may be seen as half way between medical and cultural practices. With the awareness that all normative interventions on bodies are the product of subjections of gender, sex, class, status, race, age – the ritual defloration (breaking of the hymen – 'flower') by an experienced woman may be considered as a re-appropriation, a less arduous first intercourse. The girl loses her virginity *before* the marriage, instead of during a painful and precipitous coitus with her young husband. The issue of pain and shame remains, in the patriarchal context of the ritual, with all negative elements of public performativity: it happens in front of the bride's and the groom's family women, as an intrusive inspection in the girl's intimacy. The *ajuntaora* has the power to unite (*ajuntar*) all the women who are involved in the marriage, considered to be a fusion between families, and to take upon herself the task traditionally expected of males, to deflower all the girls before marriage. However, the reasons why she is allotted such a power rests in patriarchal predominance and influence. The despotic control on the girl's body is a gender dispositive; her coercive chastity clashes with the sexual freedom of the male who is going to be her life partner with a moral religious edge: she has to be *limipia al altar* – uncontaminated, spotless in front of the altar. As Mary Douglas noticed in patriarchal cultures, females have the burden of representing the purity and virtue of the group they belong to. Besides productive and reproductive tasks, women have a moral function to embody norms and values such as chastity and fidelity that males have no intentions of respecting. Social indulgence toward the sexual incontinence of boys and men is 'unbalanced' with restrictions of freedom and various forms of bodily control on women, sometimes exerted by women themselves. Corradi, Laura (2013), pp. 7–38. See also Douglas, Mary (1991, 1st. edition 1966), *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge, London.

15 Silverman, Carol (2012), 'Education, Agency, and Power among Macedonian Muslim Romani Women in New York City', *Signs*, Vol. 38, N° 1, p. 35.

16 www.nbcnews.com/id/18789903/ns/world_news-europe/t/romania-president-sorry-stinky-Gypsy-slur/

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5 Gypsies as queer and the queer Gypsy

LGBTQIA often share the same emotions
as we [Roma] do and thus
they could be natural allies.

(Dunajeva, Kóczé, and Cemlyn 2015)

In the intersectional approach, differences are discussed with no hierarchy of importance, since they are all expressions and categories of the same system of oppression. As poet June Jordan used to say,

> I am black and I am female, and I am a mother and I am a bisexual, and I am a nationalist and I am an anti-nationalist. (. . .) And no, I do not believe it is blasphemous to compare oppressions of sexuality to oppression of race and ethnicity: Freedom is indivisible or it is nothing at all.[1]

Gypsies have been defined as a 'queer' type of people, weird and wonderful, strange and stranger, mirroring both the fantasies and anxieties of sedentary people and proprietors, and embodying all forms of otherness and differences. As posited by David Halperin,

> Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative.[2]

Yet, when diversity is about sex and gender, often it becomes a taboo topic. Because of the permanence of hetero-normative rules, individuals who show 'different' sexual preferences or gender identities tend to be excluded from family and communities. It happens also in Gypsy communities. In this section, the conditions and aspirations of LGBTQIA people are analyzed through fresh literature, research, and theorizing on the subject.

Gender identification and sexual orientation seem to be sensitive topics in many societies, as they are in Roma cultural contexts. The issue is difficult to

document, however, since historical studies on the subject are lacking. The legendary Hungarian violinist Cinka Panna, wearing male clothes and popularly renamed 'Gypsy Sappho,' was regularly married, and her biographers stress that she has always been faithful to her husband. Until recently, the topic of LGBTQIA people was not spoken about openly. Fiore Manzo, a former student in my Gender Studies and Intersectional Methodology course, wrote a final paper about the status of sexual minorities in his Roma community after interviewing a small number of gay, lesbian, and trans-sexual persons, finding evidence of exclusionary practices and painful discriminations. As reported, at times the 'diverse' one was driven to depart and live elsewhere. The very fact of talking with a 'faggot' – a person who does not conform to homosocial rules – is reportedly sufficient to risk subjecting oneself to marginalization and severe ridicule.

Dezso Máté recognizes that LGBTQIA people are afflicted by homophobic attitudes in the Gypsy community and writes about five different types of oppression toward those who have a non-heterosexual orientation or express forms of what is perceived as gender 'disconformity.'[3] Such a situation of internal oppression, acted out by the oppressed, reminds me of a study Barbara Epstein carried out on homophobia in the US Communist Party during the McCarthy era, characterized by a 'witch hunt' against Marxists. Instead of receiving solidarity, gays and lesbians were expelled from the Communist Party. The 'politically diverse' could not accept the 'sexually diverse.' Those persecuted as a group became persecutors of their own members within the group. In the same way, if the 'sexually diverse' in Gypsy communities cannot be accepted among the 'ethnically diverse,' a social group subject to external discrimination comes to discriminate internally against the most vulnerable parts of its own community.

Even though sexuality and ethnicity apparently differ as concepts and categories, both underwent similar kinds of scrutiny during decades of debate between essentialism and social constructionism. As pointed out by Daniel Baker in 'The Queer Gypsy', there are several lines of comparison between the two identities – 'ethnicity and sexuality mirror each other within cycles of concealment and revelation.'[4] In the past, sexual orientation and ethnic identity were both perceived as 'natural' – the product of negotiations, influences, and redefinitions. Yet gays and Gypsies were both targeted by the Inquisition in the Middle Ages. The persecution resulted over the subsequent centuries in medicalization and inferiorization processes in European societies and sciences. From the interviews Baker carried out on four gay, Gypsy males, common experiences of emotional and physical detachment from their families and communities clearly emerge. One of the interviewees says:

> This detachment seems to have increased after coming out, suggesting a general unwillingness to remain attached to a community that is unwilling to fully embrace them. Even though all seem essentially proud of

> their Gypsy roots, all make it clear that their detachment occurred mainly through a difficulty in combining Gayness and Gypsyness.[5]

In Gypsy and Queer social life, similar *passing* strategies are enacted:

> Both Gays and Gypsies have historically been well placed to employ strategic 'passing' with self-protection or ease of passage determining when and where to pass as straight or non-Gypsy.[6]

Passing is a social practice both enabling and constraining, as it 'can offer safety from attack' on the one hand, but on the other hand, as Baker observes, 'passing not only hurts ourselves but also the communities in which we live, which don't reap the benefits of our authentic participation.' The price of living openly as a gay is the loss of ties with the ethnic community and family. To go on living within the Gypsy community without choosing self-exile, one would have to pass as a non-gay within the community, resulting in a sort of identity dislocation that implies camouflage.

> In order to maintain full integration into Gypsy communities one has to sacrifice the open expression of sexual identity, and conversely in order to explore an openly Gay identity one's integration within the Gypsy community is compromised to a significant degree.[7]

An amazing intersection between Gypsyness and Queerness is offered by Kata Hovarth, who analyzes the discursive boundaries and possibilities of skin color at Gay Pride. Through the story of Rebeka, a Gypsy girl, Hovarth focuses on her frustration in trying to conceal both her poverty, as a cave dweller, and her ethnicity. In a white-dominated society, fair skin is synonymous with beauty and femininity: Rebeka is dark and it is not possible for her to enact common strategies of passing 'to not appear black.' But when the author and Rebeka found themselves talking about the homosexuality of a former boyfriend, and participating in the Budapest Gay parade, the festival circumstances offered her an unexpected opportunity.

> Rebeka is being looked at by more and more people as some sort of exotic beauty. More and more people are coming up to her, as she becomes increasingly comfortable with the situation. Finally, a consensus is formed about her origins and from then on, that is the game we are playing: namely that Rebeka has come from the distant land of Cuba. 'Who knows, maybe I have a little of that in me too', she says – jokingly, I think. Her brownness now appears as a form of exotic femininity. The eroticism of brownness conceals the brownness of being a Gypsy. Here she is no longer the usual 'the brownest of them all', a difference that from the point of view of femininity is devastating, but just one of the many differences that are present here. A difference that emancipates sexuality.[8]

After the event, Rebeka plans to participate again in the Gay Pride, and to keep it secret, not out of fear of homophobia in her family, but rather because the presence of girlfriends and cousins would disrupt her performance as a beauty queen and sexually desirable object. Ervin Goffman would regard such a conscious representation of self in public as a form of 'control over the back-stage.' The negative visibility she suffers among peers teasing her for being dark = ugly becomes a positive hyper-visibility at the parade. Her skin color gets eroticized. In 'the carnival-like representation of sexuality,' concludes Hovarth, 'for a few hours the blackness of Rebeka could become the performance of femininity.'[9]

One of the issues raised by Daniel Baker on the basis of his research findings regards the similarities between gay invisibility and Gypsy invisibility. Here is his complete interpretation of his interview outputs.

> All four men reported very little contact with other Gay Gypsies. It seems that they have become conditioned by the absence of models of diverse sexuality within their communities – not expecting to see, and so not seeing others like themselves. This suggests that the reported lack of mirroring throughout life has led to a fragmented sense of self – a lack of internal vocabulary with which to construct an inclusive self that enables one to see oneself reflected in others. A similar fragmentation is apparent in the way that Gypsies are portrayed and perceived by wider society. Van de Port writes of the role of the Gypsy in the popular Serbian imagination: 'the figure of the Gypsy functioned as a repository for all kinds of other shapes and guises.' As well as referring to the Gypsy's historic associations with camouflage and identity manipulation Van de Port's words highlight the ambiguity and confusion in the way that Gypsies are seen. I suggest that Gypsy communities have internalized this uncertainty over time, making for a marked dislocation between identity and self-perception – a position that has made it difficult for Gypsies to fully see themselves in the world and therefore claim their space in it. This dislocation informs the Gay Gypsy's inability to see themselves clearly – both as Gypsies in the non-Gypsy world and as Gays in the Gypsy world – an identity doubly obscured, invisible all round. Each of us inhabits multiple identities and uses external reference points to compare, contrast and reflect particular aspects of ourselves. The invisibility of Gypsies within society along with the invisibility of Gays in the Gypsy world means that key reference points are missing for Gay Gypsies; an absence that promotes the invisibility of Gay Gypsies to themselves and to others.[10]

Being unseen for what we are both obscures reality and gives space for social processes of 'phantomization,' in which undesired qualities are attached to the shadows of 'imaginary' subjects. As in a study by Lucia Fremlova and others, caste-based exclusion emerges as specific feature in the hetero-normative

Roma community, which adds issues of differentials of purity to the known types of discrimination.

> According to Czech Roma LGBT activist David Tiser,[11] Roma LGBT people are a most vulnerable group who face triple discrimination: firstly as Roma, secondly as LGBT people, and thirdly as LGBT people in the Roma community. In the case of young Roma LGBT living in ghettos, there is a fourth ground for discrimination: exclusion. (. . .) Some traditional Roma in the Czech Republic and Slovakia still maintain the concept of caste reflected in the Roma tradition of ritual purity, according to which some people in the Roma communities cannot take part in the preparation of food. Similarly, in some families, LGBT people are still perceived as unclean. If they touch a plate or other items, everything has to be thrown away after they have left because it is unclean, or they have their separate plates and cutlery. At the same time, as Maria and David's life stories show, when living in a close-knit Roma community where each of the members depends on one another, Roma young LGBT people are accepted and relied upon by their non-LGBT counterparts in a way which is indicative of a high degree of intra-communal acceptance.[12]

Narratives offered in *Barabaripen: Young Roma speak about multiple discrimination* open a window on the situation of Queer people in eastern Europe. Here I want to quote excerpts from two of the stories. The first one is a gay male: Freju, 36 years old, originally from Golem, Kavajë, Albania, living in Tirana. He identifies as Roma Egyptian.[13]

> My partner's mother and brothers do not accept me. My parents know about my sexual orientation but have been in a sort of denial, I think. They still hope it's not true and they keep pressuring me to come back to my hometown and marry a girl, any girl, as they say. I have never told them that I live with my partner but I've introduced them and they were very impolite to him, as if they knew or suspected something. I know my mum suspects because she'd tell me a couple of times that she is worried about what people are saying about me in my hometown. This really hurts me because my family is a crucial part of my life. I always saw them as the basis of my life and I was raised to uphold values, such as God, love and family. Still, everything I've learned in my family about the way you should treat your beloved ones I use in my life and in my relationship with my partner. We are dedicated, and full of tolerance and mutual understanding. All the decisions we make, we make together.[14]

The second narration comes from Maria, 28 years old, who lives with her partner in Belvil, an informal Roma settlement in Belgrade, Serbia. She does not identify explicitly as lesbian or bisexual. While telling her story Maria refers

to a former husband and a present relation with a woman. The following is a rather long quote, but I consider it valuable because it synthesizes multiple issues that the subject is dealing with – class, status, gender, sexual orientation, and religious differences.

> I live in a small shack made of cardboard, and old carpets coated with a new nylon covering I got just a few weeks ago, in an area that was once the largest informal Roma settlement in Belgrade's business area. My shack is rather tiny but I spend most of the time with my partner in the shack next to mine. I moved to Belgrade from Novi Sad five years ago, escaping a violent husband who was making me suffer to an extent one can hardly imagine.
>
> Soon after escaping him I met another woman with a similarly worrisome fate: we were both harassed by our husbands and we made the decision not to marry again nor live with a man ever again. Over time our relationship became more emotional. Other settlement dwellers were more vocal about my partner's sexual orientation than about mine. Yes, they call us lesbians. So what? I don't mind what other people are doing, so why should they mind what I am doing? Apart from being finger-pointed all the time, I haven't been harassed or discriminated against by other community members. There are also several transgender people in the settlement and I think our community is quite tolerant. Everyone should live their life the way they want. (. . .) It isn't always that easy, especially for us, residents of informal settlements. In Belvil, we have been waiting to be evicted for a number of years now while waiting for loop roads for Ada Bridge to be built on the site where our houses are now. Talks with our community have taken place and the housing options after resettlement have been explained to us. My partner and I have opted for a joint household. We explained to the authorities that the two of us constitute a family and should live in one household. Serbia has no registered partnerships and I don't think anyone else has ever applied for social housing claiming to live in a same-sex partnership and to be treated as a family. Although we are two barely educated Roma women living in quite bad conditions, we dared ask to be recognized as a same-sex family and, when resettled, to be granted one social housing unit where we will be living together. Our request has been accepted.
>
> It is now up to us to decide how we will organize our life once resettled. Yet some other differences are standing in our way: religion is one of them, for example. I consider myself a Muslim, though not a practicing one. Yet I observe the religious holiday Eid (Bajram), which I embraced later in life, and I identify with people who celebrate it. My partner, on the other hand, is a Christian and she stresses that it is important to her. There has never been a misunderstanding between us because of that, though. We both have our own fantasies about a joint life once we move into the social flat. We have already visited several locations and chose one during

> the consultations, but nothing is certain as yet. Life is by no means going to be easy on us when we resettle. The social housing is located on the outskirts of Belgrade and jobs are hard to find. We are now surviving by collecting mostly scrap metal which is dumped around the settlement where we are living in, and that will not be a possibility once we move into social housing. Finding a job with my education will be hard. My partner recently started working for a company. She has a part-time job that pays less than the minimal wage even if she works full-time. At least this gives some certainty though. She has an identity card, so they took her. She is also entitled to health and social insurance. (. . .) The reason why I can't get any health insurance is because I currently have no identity card either. I'd need to travel to Novi Sad to obtain a new one; the travel costs and all the administrative costs of issuing an identity card would be a fortune. We spoke to city officials when they were here and the only reply I got is that they can pay for my return journey, nothing else. We also tried to explain to them that my partner and I live in a sort of union and that I need health insurance as next of kin. We never got any reply to this. But when I think of the possibilities and rights I will be able to attain, I am interested in getting those documents. I need to learn more and about everything. There is a whole life before me, you know.[15]

In Maria's story, the ways in which categories of oppression are interlocked and mutually constitutive is evident. Her partner is lucky: she has a document of identity and found a job, but because she is a Gypsy she is paid less than a part-time worker, despite working full-time. Maria does not have an identity card, which excludes her from finding a paid job. At the same time, poverty does not allow her to cover the travel and administrative expenses necessary to obtain the document. Also, being in an unrecognized 'sort of union' with a woman makes her ineligible for social benefits. Thanks to their determination, however, a certain degree of recognition as a same-sex family and joint household was obtained during the resettlement.

There seem to be different degrees of 'living in the closet,' which is a quite common 'choice.' In some cases, young gay Roma opt for a double lifestyle of simultaneously conforming to community expectations and still enacting their sexual orientation.

> There are unwritten rules in Roma communities. A man has to be a man and a woman has to be a woman. A Roma man must have a wife: the contrary simply does not exist. Even if you are twenty years old and still study, they want you to have a wife and children. I was lucky because no one ever called me 'fag' to my face. My family felt ashamed and I had a lot of difficulties within my family. I chose to be open with my wife about my experiences and fights in relation to my sexuality and the prejudice I had had to cope with. I wanted to be accepted as I am. I regard myself as a gay man whose lifestyle is heterosexual now.[16]

The interviewee does not define himself as a bisexual, even if his behavior could be labeled in such a way. His identity is not that of a bisexual person, but rather one of a gay man on whom a heterosexual lifestyle has been socially imposed. The affirmation 'a man is a man' indicates how different models of masculinity, in alternative to the dominant one, are not yet readily available.

During a three-day gathering of Roma and pro-Roma activists and thinkers in Budapest (October 2014), titled *Nothing about Us Without Us? Roma Participation in Knowledge Production and Policy Making*, themes such as Feminism and the status of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) minorities within the Romani movement were discussed in the context of a 'pedagogy of hope,' without which the Romani Movement would stagnate. As Bogdán et al. asserted at the introduction of the proceedings,

> Feminist and LGBT activists are great resources and allies, who have developed amazing strengths in their battles to overcome not just racism but also sexism and homophobia. To be Gay and/or a Feminist and a Roma makes us realize that identity and tradition are not rigid and fixed phenomena, and therefore should not be oppressive but should be dynamic, inclusive and innovative, keeping the best of the old while reinventing and mixing identity with new outlooks and behavior.[17]

The above statement is particularly valuable because it addresses simultaneously the spirit of intersectionality and the need for alliances, with a focus on social change; nothing is permanent. The essay 'LGBTQIA, Feminism and Romani Studies' adds remarks about the discussion at the conference *Nothing about Us Without Us?* held in Budapest in 2014. A diversity of positions found expression at the conference – while on one hand some saw an opportunity for Roma communities, feminists, and LGBTQIA people to 'to join forces in the struggle for equality,' others felt that 'a premature alliance would dilute the Roma cause.'

Jekatyerina Dunajeva, Angéla Kóczé, and Sarah Cemlyn made a point about the necessity of intersectional research and politics including sexual orientation, disability, age differences,[18] and transgender[19] issues within the Roma community. As stated,

> The lack of intersectional analysis has been a pervasive issue for Romani feminists. They have highlighted the intense marginalization of Romani women and the oppression they experience both from the dominant society and within communities, including domestic violence, alongside their absence within mainstream feminist and anti-racist discourse and the programs of non-governmental organizations. They have faced assertions that being a feminist and a Romani are contradictory or incompatible, as Nicoleta Bitu also found when she declared herself a Romani feminist in an event at the European Parliament in 2005. The work of Romani women activists is obscured and often rendered invisible, as are the lives of

> Romani women generally, compared to the recognition accorded to male leaders of the Roma Movement.[20]

'Recognition' seems to be a key term in the present debate. The achievement of respect for all differences is perceived to be urgent. There is also a need within communities for self-reflection about identity issues, culture, and the tension between past and future.

> The intercultural terms Gypsy and Queer are both used to describe globally linked collectivities of identity rather than fixed identity positions. This 'un-fixity' relates not only to the range of possibilities within each identity position but also to the persistence of community and cultural values independent of geographical territory.[21]

Being 'stateless collectives,' both Gypsies and Queers have no country, no army, no fixed boundaries. Gypsy flags, as well as Queer flags, deeply represent places of the soul. In the struggle of Kurdish people in Rojava (Öcalan 2016; Corradi 2016), there emerged political theories about *overcoming the state*, as a historically obsolete form, in favor of federations of different communities. Such ideas of direct democracy and self-government are being developed by Kurdish women and men in a dramatically difficult situation of resistance, against the Islamic State and the fascist and genocidal politics of Turkey. The international interest in a democratic federalism in Rojava can be explained by an emphasis on interculturality, inter-religiosity and a commitment to constitutionally overcoming class and gender inequalities. In fact, the Rojava Social Contract, signed by several different ethnic groups, calls for cooperation, women's rights and the valorization of diversities. It may become an inspirational model for all stateless communities, for the development of self-government and alliances.[22]

By recalling Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy's writings on Diaspora, Daniel Baker considers how

> Collective identities are generally created through recognition of commonality – shared origin, common goals or characteristics. Without disregarding the importance of this mirroring process, Stuart Hall stresses the overriding influence of difference in our construction of identity. He suggests that identities are 'more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity.' In other words, commonalities are important – but identities are also defined and constructed through contrast. These ideas are echoed in the work of Paul Gilroy in which he examines the construction of diaspora identities in relation to host societies. He suggests that concepts of collective identity are generally promoted and perceived as natural (or mythic), concealing the fact that they have, at some time, been socially constructed. Gilroy uses the concept of diaspora to examine cross-national

> workings of identity formation, questioning the relevance of identity as fixed and unchanging. Where diaspora challenges the idea of identity as essential and absolute, it also disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity: '[diaspora] stages the dynamic processes of identity formation in a specific manner, *accentuating the power that people enjoy to create themselves and their distinctive cultures where this cannot be openly acknowledged*. (my emphasis)[23]

Similarities between Gypsyness and Queerness may not be convincing to everyone, and they are not meant to be. The important issue at this point regards the growth in awareness about LGBT themes and the necessity of dealing with diversities in an inclusive way. Queer Gypsies are part of their communities and their contribution is crucial at this stage.

> Romani identity should be reconsidered to include the feminist perspective, rather than replace it. Learning from or joining with other movements remained an issue without consensus, but it was critical for these arguments to emerge, and at times clash and settle. 'Radical respect for difference' was a key statement during the discussion – respecting and celebrating gender, ethnic, and all other differences should be the overarching goal, which could lead to more open, accepting societies. The truly enriching comments came from audience members who affiliate with several groups.[24]

Identity construction is a collective endogenous process that happens through resistance to assimilation and a conscious selection of the inputs coming from the outside – collective self-reflection and social and political agency are all ingredients of such a change. As Okely suggests, 'Gypsy cultural identity is constructed through opposition, not isolation.'[25] Identity is also created in the constant *assemblage*[26] of the parts of self – to use Jasbir Puar's terms – in the making of a queer theory that also proposes affective politics. The awareness of the power we have in choosing[27] and building our identity is vital to understanding alliances among diverse subjectivities and communities.

Notes

1 Jordan, June (April 1993), 'International Directory of Bisexual Groups', compiled by Robyn Ochs, *The East Coast Bisexual Network*, Cambridge, MA.
2 Halperin, David (1997), 'Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography', *Sexualities*, Vol. 13, N° 3, p. 62.
3 Dezso, Máté (2015), 'Faced with Multiple 'Values' – from the Perspective of the Roma LGBTQ Community', *Roma Rights: Journal of the European Roma Right Center*, N° 2, pp. 93–99.
4 Baker, Daniel (2015), 'The Queer Gypsy', *Roma Rights: Journal of the European Roma Right Center,* N° 2, p. 88.
5 Ibid, p. 89.

6 Ibid, p. 88.
7 Ibid, p. 91.
8 Horvant, Kata (2010), 'Passing: Rebeka and the Gay Pride: On the Discursive Boundaries and Possibilities of Skin Colour', in *Multi-Disciplinary Approaches to Romani Studies: Selected Papers from Participants of Central European University's Summer Courses 2007–2009*, ed. by Stewart Michael and Rövid Márton, Central European University, Budapest, p. 129.
9 Ibid, p. 130.
10 Baker, Daniel (2015), p. 90.
11 David Tišer is Director of the non-profit organization ARA ART, and he is the author of the first comprehensive study on Roma LGBTQ in the Czech Republic called Homosexuality in the Romani Community. He graduated in Romani Studies from Charles University, Prague.
12 Fremlova, Lucia and Georgescu, Mara, ed. (2014), *Barabaripen. Young Roma Speak about Multiple Discrimination*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, pp. 22–23. Available from: www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/BARABARIPEN_en.pdf
13 Trubeta, Sevasti (2005), 'Balkan Egyptians and Gypsy/Roma Discourse', *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 33, N° 1, pp. 71–95.
14 Fremlova, Lucia and Georgescu, Mara, ed. (2014), p. 71.
15 Ibid, pp. 39–40.
16 Ibid, p. 79.
17 European Roma Right Center (ERRC) Roma Rights: Journal of the European Roma Rights Centre (2015), *Nothing about Us Without Us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production*, N° 2, Budapest. The video recordings of most of the sessions are available at: http://romaempowerment.wordpress.com.
18 Age is discussed sometimes in terms of generations, for example when addressing the greater level of involvement of young Romani women against the 'virginity cult' in Macedonia and other countries. Others have noted that belonging to the older generation can provide a safer milieu for women's activism within the community.
19 David Tišer is Director of the non-profit organization ARA ART and the author of the first comprehensive study on Roma LGBTQ in the Czech Republic, *Homosexuality in the Romani Community*. In an interview, he reports how 'There is a shocking and interesting story of a transgender man who participated in my survey. The person underwent surgery and is now male. After the operation, his family said that their son had become really healthy because SHE wasn't a lesbian anymore, now HE is straight. It shows clearly the confusion and misunderstanding around this issue.' ERRC, *Roma Rights: Journal of the European Roma Right Center,* N° 2, pp. 99.
20 Ibid, p. 76.
21 Baker, Daniel (2015), pp. 88–89.
22 Öcalan, Abdullah (2016), *Scritti dal carcere. Oltre lo Stato, il potere e la violenza* [*Bir Halkı Savunmak],* Lavo Simona trans. by, Edizioni Punto Rosso, Milano; Sáenz, Charlotte Maria (2017), 'Other Worlds, Women Up in Arms: Zapatista and Rojava Kurds Embrace a New Gender Politics. Available from: www.huffington post.com/beverly-bell/women-up-in-arms-zapatist_b_6891494.html.
23 Baker, Daniel (2015), p. 89.
24 Dunajeva, Jekatyerina, Kóczé, Angéla and Cemlyn, Sarah (2015), 'LGBTQIA, Feminism and Romani Studies', *Roma Rights: Journal of the European Roma Right Center*, N° 2, p. 75.

25 Okely, Judith (2010), p. 53.
26 Puar, K. Jasbir (2007), *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Duke University Press, Durham.
27 Acton, Thomas and Mundy, Gary, ed. (1997), *Cultural Ingenuity and Traveling Autonomy: Not Copying, Just Choosing, in Romani Culture and Gypsy Identity*, University of Hertfordshire Press, Hatfield Hertfordshire.

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6 Academic invisibility, Gypsy epistemology, and the importance of 'Halfies'

What happens to research
when the researched
become the researchers?

(Linda Tuhiwae Smith 1999, p. 185)

Through her writings, Angéla Kóczé posits several very significant questions of feminist epistemology: Which version of truth will prevail? Who has the power to legitimize knowledge, experiences, or theories? Which institutions benefit from the knowledge produced on the Roma? As a matter of fact, much of Romani studies are still controlled by non-Romani/White scholars, and most Universities are still 'colonial' and upper-class places, where the cultural elites and academic hierarchies defend their own privileges. This is a personally/politically painful issue for those who work in such a context – one that should be dealt with using feminist tools.

> One of the possible strategies could be to (. . .) keep the pain as a private matter. However, this strategy would keep Romani scholars silenced and we would never start to deconstruct the knowledge production at the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality (just to mention a few sensitive categories). Now it is time for Romani intellectuals (. . .) not to mirror and reproduce dominant masculine power games and hegemony but rather to create and foster reflection, dialogue and cooperation between Roma and non-Roma in order to emancipate the subjugated knowledge.[1]

As coordinator of the Roma Education Fund, Marius Taba pointed out that *institutional racism* is structural within universities, where still today 'if a Roma scholar makes a statement, it is discounted as subjective.'[2] It is crucial to understand how the invisibility of Gypsy knowledge production and low social status are both reinforced in the academic world. In western universities, the portion of research oriented toward participatory social transformation is still miniscule; self-reflection, in terms of gender/race/class relations, is

usually absent; and empowerment and partnership have become empty words, i.e., 'emancipatory concepts are being subverted[3] and/or tokenized.'[4]

Yet, winds of change are blowing in the new millennium. A 'Roma Spring,' a period of critical consciousness, new militancy, and assertiveness, is taking place. Similar processes happened during the 'African Renaissance,' when scholars became conscious of *Gharbzadegi* and initiated processes of 'Western detoxification,'[5] and also during and after the anti-colonial struggle in India, with the making of *Subaltern Studies*[6] to give voice to the voiceless. Today in the milieu of Gypsy scholars, the goal to decolonize knowledge and *de-link* from the dominant culture is crucial. Roma scholars Bogdán, Ryder, and Taba notice how

> such a process of awakening and decolonialisation has already occurred amongst other systematically marginalised communities. Be it amongst the Aboriginal People of Australia or First Nations of Canada and the USA, movements for self-determination have been pivotal in creating a new generation of leadership, new outlooks and a sense of confidence and pride in identity. Yet this assertiveness has also been accompanied by disappointments and forms of subversion, with some of the new and emerging community thinkers being subsumed into the academic and wider establishment. Will these processes appear in the Roma Spring? Will the Roma Spring permeate to the grassroots through inclusive approaches to research which can scale and dismantle the perceived aloof ivory towers of the traditional academic establishment? Or are the defenders of the status quo, namely positivist academic critics, correct in their assessment that these activist-researchers have succumbed to a post-colonialist fad and have been reading too much Foucault, instead of undertaking so-called 'objective' scientific research.[7]

The critique of neutrality in favor of a 'standpoint theory' has been an important issue in feminist theory. In such processes of awakening and decolonization,[8] there is a serious risk of cooptation of ideas, activists, and intellectuals. The problem has been discussed by Maori theoretician Graham Hingangaroa Smith, who criticized *domestication* and what he has labeled as *privatized academic behavior*, usually developed by 'individual academics outside of collective political responsibility, conscience or consciousness (. . .) primarily motivated by self-serving academic outcomes for promotion, institutional advancement' and worried about getting recognition by white hierarchies. To counteract such behavior, it is crucial to have a self-reflective attitude and the will 'to critically challenge ourselves' and develop what Graham Hingangaroa Smith calls *a politics of truth*.[9]

First and foremost, the myth of neutrality in social sciences has to be defeated, through the establishment of valuable research projects, with a decolonizing and intersectional approach, carried out *by*, *with*, and *for* Gypsies. At the same time, a systematic critique of mainstream studies *on* Gypsies needs

to be developed.[10] The importance of participatory research-action cannot be overstated, as per all indigenous populations – being subjected to research was part of the process of cultural inferiorization and social oppression. The Gypsies of Europe have been one of the most studied groups in terms of social control. The time has now come to carry out research about white cultures and their problems, such as racism and xenophobia. In relation to research on marginalized communities, bottom-up participation to all stages of any study should be emphasized – from conceptualization to methodology, with involvement in both theoretical and practical phases of action-research. This is a vital step for the creation of a decolonized and liberating knowledge.[11]

As Violeta Vajda has indicated, in order to give a correct picture of reality we need to be aware of the hermeneutic dialogue with the Other. Recalling Gadamer's work on *Truth and Method*, she looks at the posture required of the researcher: 'one always needs to be prepared that the other may be right,' an attitude rarely found in academic institutions.

> To prepare us for the other being right, hermeneutics rescues the notion of prejudice from its 'current pejorative connotation'. (. . .) Thus prejudice in the social sciences is no longer considered an obstacle – instead it becomes simply the starting point of any dialogue, something freely acknowledged and eagerly challenged through the art of questioning and remaining open to new insights.[12]

A socio-political discourse is necessary about conceptualizing and embracing Gypsy identity as people of color. As Vajda posits, 'hermeneutics can lead to a deep, politically engaged and long-term process where identities of participants are examined, deconstructed and perhaps reconstructed in a way that expands the understanding of those involved.'[13]An essay of Ethel Brooks explains the importance, in Romani Studies, of feminists and 'Halfies' (those who, for some reason, become social hybrids) looking for new epistemological possibilities. She refers to the work of anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod[14]:

> In *Writing Against Culture*, anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod argues for the importance of two critical groups 'whose situations neatly expose and challenge the most basic of [anthropological] premises: feminists and "halfies" – people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage.' Abu-Lughod goes on to say, 'The importance of these groups lies not in any superior moral claim or advantage they may have in doing anthropology, but in the special dilemmas they face, dilemmas that reveal starkly the problems with cultural anthropology's assumption of a fundamental distinction between self and other.' Romani scholars – scholars who come from Romani backgrounds, families, and communities – are quintessential 'halfies,' moving between Romani and Gadje worlds through processes of migration, education and parentage. The dilemmas faced by Romani academic, artists and cultural

> producers call into question notions of authenticity, on the one hand, and a pure space of culture, on the other. Romani communities stretch across Europe, into the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australia and have been marked by migration, deportation and slavery, as well as by mixing and intermarriage, cultural shifts and adaptation, along with preservation of language, cultural practices and identity formations across centuries of migration and settlement.[15]

Hybrid identities can play a pivotal role in the production of liberation research and knowledge.[16] As Ethel Brooks follows in her reasoning,

> As feminists, as 'halfies,' as engaged scholars, we can produce a Romani Studies that is at once critical of its own production and that works toward dismantling the 'West as Subject,' thus opening a more radical critique of the workings of 'law, political economy and ideology' that place Roma at the bottom of epistemological and material hierarchies both within and outside of Europe.[17]

Brooks ends her theoretical excursus by considering how the work of feminists and halfies can allow for a reconfiguration of post-colonial epistemologies that go beyond the nation-state and the limits of the western 'mind-body split,' and look forward to an epistemic construction that serves as a collective practice grounded in 'everyday life, labor and love. Collective community, familial groundings can be taken seriously as producers of subjectivity and of knowledge, rather than simply as context.'[18]

Despite the importance of empirical and epistemological contributions in social sciences, the neglect regarding publications by Romani is notable. The same can be said if we look at mainstream gender studies. For most scholars, Gypsy feminism represents an unheard of phenomenon. To appreciate such a perspective, white women need to activate non-dichotomous ways of thinking, interrogating their own patterns of knowledge, and recognize the *locatedness*[19] of their experience, which is still substantially colonial.

To understand the specificity of intersecting axes of difference among various ethnic and non-ethnic Gypsy cultures, it is important to see oppressed identities (also) as the product of a social construction of otherness, having white European cultures as its horizon. Over centuries of persecution, racism and sexism produced a psychosocial twofold torsion of resistance to annihilation and adaptation for survival.[20] The same process can be witnessed in academic environments, where there seems to be little space for the caravan dweller researcher/professor, either materially or symbolically. In such a context, Gypsy feminism is an irreplaceable stimulus to re-think knowledge production and feminist relations transnationally in a new non-hierarchical way, taking into account *personal relationships* as a barometer. Making space for Gypsy feminism means to step out of the north–south paradigm, which does not apply to all peoples, and to take into account the indigenous realities in countries

of the global north. Understanding Gypsy women's knowledge and feminism means taking into consideration Native and non-dichotomous epistemologies, where the boundaries start to blur.[21]

I would like to conclude this section on epistemological issues by describing a mode of writing, chosen by Bitu and Vincze, participants at the Symposium on Romani Feminism who co-authored a 'four-hands' presentation, in which they split the page in two parts vertically to symmetrically juxtaposing the activist and the scholar narrations, the Romani and the Gadje discourse, and the Gypsy and the non-Gypsy feminist standpoints.[22] I found this creation very truthful and fascinating, both at the political and at the symbolic levels. The voices conveyed are distinct yet intertwined, as is the reality of feminist relationships in this day and age.

Notes

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3 Here subversion does not indicate a bottom-up type of action in order to shift from the emancipatory paradigm to liberation politics. In the authors' context, the subversion of emancipatory concepts suggests these are being undermined, weakened, and domesticated. About the risk of cooptation see Maori theoretician Smith, Graham (2012), 'Kaupapa Maori: The Dangers of Domestication', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 47, N° 2, pp. 10–20; Black, Taiarahia, ed. (2014), *Enhancing Mātauranga Māori and Global Indigenous Knowledge*, New Zealand Qualification Authority, Wellington.
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7 Body politics, media-activism, and the re-appropriation of signifiers

In order for music to free itself,
it will have to pass over to the other side,
where territories tremble,
where the structures collapse,
where the ethos gets mixed up,
where a powerful song of the earth is unleashed;
great mantra transmute all the airs,
carry away and make returns.

(Gilles Deleuze, 1993, p. 104)

Given the profound effects visual culture has on society at large, one of the key areas of political activity for feminists is monitoring and criticizing existent media. Another field of feminist commitment is creating new media to establish autonomous production of knowledge, ideas, and images. Re-appropriating the body – after slavery and persecution, annihilation and inferiorization – is of great significance from a semiotic viewpoint, too.[1]

Gypsies are still the most demonized peoples of Europe, subject to persistent, centuries-old stereotypes and new forms of scapegoating, which today are strictly connected with the effects of neoliberal policies and the economic crisis in Europe.[2] The media industry that manufactures consent shapes people's thinking and knowledge. Social manipulations against the Gypsies take place through cultural constructions, the use of images, and the incitement of feelings.[3]

Maria Bogdán reminds us of the constitutive nature of images and symbols in her essay 'The Role of Media Representation in Knowledge Production about Roma,' in which she deconstructs an infamous documentary, *The Gypsy-Hungarian Coexistence*, in which Roma are defined as criminals by nature, stigmatized for having too many children and improper sexual habits. Bogdán defines deconstruction as 'going inside the image (the stereotypical image) and exposing it from inside.' Such a practice 'may result in opening up stereotypes and making them uninhabitable.'[4] The negative work of decoding and exposing the underlying sexism and racism of images and concepts should

be combined with the creation of positive representations – a task rendered possible today by social media and online forms of knowledge production.

The flourishing of Gypsy women networks, feminist bloggers, and gender activists is an indicator of a situation in rapid change. Here we mention just a few examples in the English language, which obviously cannot be fully representative of the rich production of new media expressing gender issues and feminist politics in a multitude of languages.

Sherrie Smith is Project Coordinator at Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment Hertfordshire. In the last issue of *Travellers' Time. The Only Magazine for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers*, Sherrie Smith expressed her disapproval about a video by Ricky Gervais, improperly portraying Gypsy women. In fact, 'Lady Gypsy,' a trailer for a new film, *David Brent: Life on the Road*, is replete with romantic stereotypes, hitting both the male and female characters.

> The 'Lady Gypsy' is adorned in an ankle length long flowing skirt, with a shawl and is a racist and sexist stereotype. The lyrics are even more disturbing; 'She was a Traveller BUT she was pretty and clean.' So it goes on, and she lays him down on a bed of heather offering free sex but selling the heather for a pound.[5]

Sherrie Smith, as a journalist and media activist, urges for a campaign against the video, which is being shown in movie theaters and in the media to adults and children as a seductive cultural product even as it damages the image of the Travellers community.

> Let's all complain to the BBC. Let's all boycott the film, and if you see 'Lady Gypsy' being shown in a cinema as a trailer, then make sure to make your feelings known to the manager. And finally, let's all demonstrate at the film premier in London. I wonder if he would find it so funny if some real 'Lady Gypsies' turned up to accuse him of racism at the West End opening night? I know Gervais probably wants publicity for his film – but accusations of racism are not good publicity and mud sticks. We should stand together on this and if we don't kick up a big, noisy fuss, then it is certainly a foregone conclusion that some other has-been comedian will only see *the lack of response from us as a green-light to pick on us* when they need to ridicule a minority group to boost their flagging career. (my emphasis)[6]

Exotification is a form of racism,[7] and beauty contests are as offensive and diminishing to Gypsy women as to anyone else. On September 25, 2016, a blogger wrote a complaint about the 12th 'Miss Roma' competition, held at the House of Culture in the Czech town of Hodonín.

> I have always had mixed feelings about this contest (. . .) Along with overcoming misogyny, sexism, homophobia, retributive justice, dismissive

> attitudes toward children, repressive education (or re-education), consumerism and racism (including antiGypsyism!), rejecting machismo is the direct cultural/political basis for what today is sometimes called the cultural left. In this respect, Czech society as a whole is still consistently very conservative and traditional, and the difference between Czech culture and that of Western European countries in this regard is striking. The other side of the coin of sexism is just as much a part of it, and that is the side that covers up gender inequality and discrimination against women through the compliments paid to women as female bodies, the celebration of them as female bodies, male gallantry toward them, that 'Ladies first', that view of them as the 'weaker sex', that male kissing of the female hand that seems so ridiculous to people in parts west of the Czech Republic. This includes the exploitation of sexuality, eroticism, and the female body in the advertisements that have gradually permeated all of public life here. One component of this is all of these female appearance competitions of the 'Miss' variety. On the other hand, I have not observed anything as harmful as sexism during events and marches such as Roma Pride, which I consider to be an appropriate promotion of *romipen*.[8]

One may think the blogger is a young Gypsy feminist, and be surprised the post was written by a man, Petr Uhl, former Commissioner for Human Rights for the Czech Republic, and Chair of the Inter-ministerial Commission for Romani Community Affairs. He sees the beauty contest as sexist and assimilationist in the larger society, and he calls for self-reflection by the leftist political community in the national context. Protests against beauty contests in Europe and North America were an important catalyst for women's energies at the dawn of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. The slogan 'the personal is political' led to the challenging of an un-discussed set of patriarchal roles, subjecting them to scrutiny and creative dismantling actions.[9] Uhl argues that it is 'undignified to sell female beauty' in the context of the struggle for ethnic liberation.

> We cannot get rid of discrimination against Romani people and the reduction of human dignity that it entails by simultaneously demeaning the dignity of women by reducing them to admiration of female beauty and the graceful contours of the female body.[10]

Petr Uhl carries out his critique of male domination, which is expressed in a community showing off women's beauty. He offers an important parallel between the commodification of Gypsy artifacts and the exposition of female bodies. Both phenomena belong to the same process of exotification of culture; what happens to Gypsy women also happens to music and songs:

> Guided tours of excluded localities, mainly undertaken by journalists, were seen by many Romani people as like a sort of visit to the 'zoo',

> and some Romani musicians even became reluctant to perform publicly in concert.[11]

While stereotypical images of Gypsy women and men are rejected, and official beauty standards refused, a re-signification of the Gypsy body takes place in the artistic milieu at multiple levels of consciousness and expression, in a self-managed and liberating way – from dance to theater, street art to photography. The material and semiotic oppression lived by Gypsies compels us to a re-signification of signs and items of recognition, such as clothes, hair, and gestures. Claiming them back has the effect of re-dignifying a whole process of adaptation to adverse conditions through history (and her/story). As Gallery 8 posits,

> The social assignment of Roma Bodies to an underclass is an historical construct that has multiple origins, rooted in the institutions of both slavery and mass media. It theorizes how race is enacted in the moment of the gaze, and how this spectatorial surveillance complicates social relations because of how it is historically and inextricably woven into the European collective consciousness and the European cultural ethos via popular media.[12]

The re-appropriation of ethnic signs and the struggle against the trade of bodies and cultural products in the all-pervasive market are both political processes that have been walked by people of color all over the world. This is particularly true of Maori, Dalit, Adivasi, Aboriginals, First Nation, and other Native populations, amongst which it is important to mention the Maori of New Zealand/Aotearoa, who have been remarkably successful in asserting Maori reality and *Kaupapa* (knowledge).[13]

The awareness of a cultural theft of objects and identity is often combined with the criticism of white supremacy and its power to define Gypsy lives. To use Margareta Matache's words, *Gadje-ness*[14] defines both the marginalization and the exotification of Gypsies. There is 'No Innocent Picture,' says the title of an initiative on *Roma Body Politics* by Gallery 8, the mission of which is the liberation of the Roma body.

> We are stolen artifacts, physically, mentally, artistically. (. . .) How we are perceived by 'others' is still valued more important than how we see ourselves in the world view. (. . .) A colonialist way of seeing dominates the language that surrounds us and many others still, and continues to try and suppress us.[15]

The colonial gaze is all pervasive and it plays a pivotal role in the endurance of so-called *Western civilization*, which 'would be a good idea,' as Mahatma Gandhi ironically stated. As explained by Quijano, the coloniality of power shapes the way in which economic, social, and cultural dominations take form

and reproduce themselves, both in open and surreptitious ways, in racist statements as well as through exotification practices.

> Orientalism and its legacy still infiltrates ways of seeing and in order to be seen a different space needs to be created that refuses to speak in the language that has continued and allowed our bodies to be objectified, highly sexualized and stereotyped. I say no to identity theft. I say no to who you think I am. I say no to what you think I should look like.[16]

The complexity of identity-focused discursive practices, in the galaxy of body politics related to social images, can also be found on the website *I am a European Roma Woman*, created by a handful of activists who urge Roma to 'speak up and be the change.'

> We are five Roma women who wish to build a movement powered by us Roma women to shape our own image and empower ourselves and our communities as we share our experiences, our view of current issues, our vision of the future. For the very first time, modern communication technologies are giving us the chance to build a virtual space for our own self-representation and make connections, wherever we are. It is up to us to speak out and be the change! We work together to make our lives and our communities stronger! Our own strength ensures that our children can grow up healthy, ready to learn and proud.[17]

The first aim is 'to challenge centuries-old stereotypes about who we are and the image we have in the mainstream media,' aware of the power of misrepresentations in perpetrating stigma and exclusion. Several points are listed as a program 'to create a sustainable network of Roma women activists and the conditions for effective advocacy of issues related to Roma women.' These goals can be seen as the embryo of a political program, ranging from academic oppression to identity issues, from the specific needs of young women to the necessity of finding alliances. The women funders of the group make a redemptive connection between the old and the new agenda – embracing history, cultural survival, and identities, while at the same time building connections, enlarging visions, and developing knowledge.

I would like to end this section with an epistemological reflection about Gypsy knowledge production and the possibility of subverting the dominant paradigm in the strategic milieu of formal education as well as white knowledge supremacy in society.

> The extent to which feminism is an organic as well as academic perspective within the range of women's grassroots activism is one of several theoretical and practical questions that have arisen in this field. *More research about how Romani women without a high level of formal education conceptualize their daily struggles against oppression* and the

> mutually enriching connections that can be made with Romani feminist theorizing could be valuable. This requires more collaborative work from feminist scholars to work together with local Romani women, who do not necessarily identify themselves as feminists, and to theorize together their gendered social and political struggles. (my emphasis)[18]

Bringing together educated and non-educated women in a non-hierarchical way is a strategic point. This is what happens today in the theory and practice of Kurdish feminism,[19] breaking centuries-old barriers. At the Star Academia of Women in Rojava, students and teachers from different communities, of different ages and status, cooperate. And, most importantly, they participate in the university *regardless of whether they have a degree or not*. The principle is that every woman has knowledge, every woman can study, learn, teach, produce ideas and projects; such a determination opens up a quite revolutionary perspective. The notion that 'a cook can govern,' as the West Indies black theoretician C.R.L. James put it, is becoming a reality.[20]

Notes

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9 In New York the first protest against a beauty contest, staged in New York in 1968, was organized by Carol Hanisch, leader of a Radical Women group, against the

Miss America event. Since then the slogan 'the personal is political' spread in Europe, India, and other parts of the world, to indicate that what happens in the seemingly private spheres of the family, sexuality, and reproduction, has important relevance in terms of gender dynamics and power relations. 'The personal is political' also signifies the unity between everyday life struggles, body politics, and feminist political agency – and was at the very foundation of 'consciousness raising' groups, a crucial feminist practice in the 1970s.

10 Ibid, note 8.

11 Ibid.

12 Gallery 8, Roma Body Politics, No Innocent Picture, Exposition 12 March 2015–3 April 2015. Available from: http://gallery8.org/en/news/2/73/roma-body-politics-i-no-innocent-picture; see also the Catalyst, *Debating Race, Identity, Citizenship and Culture*, The art exposition 'No Gorgios' 9 March 2007. Available from: www.juliushonnor.com/catalyst/Default.aspx.LocID-0hgnew0rk.RefLocID-0hg01b00100600f001.Lang-EN.htm

13 The contribution of the Maori intellectual community is essential in the effort of decolonizing social sciences. Smith, Tuhiwai Linda (1999), *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books, London, New York. The recent edition of the book (2012) contains precious extra chapters. Smith, Hingangaroa Graham (2012), 'Interview Kaupapa Māori: The Danger of Domestication', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 47, N° 2; McIntosh, T. (2014), 'Indigenous Knowledges: Insight and Intrigue', in *Whispers and Vanities: Samoan Indigenous Knowledge and Religion*, ed. by T. M. Suaalii-Sauni, M. A. Wendt, Mo'a V, N. Fuamatu, Va'ai UL, R. Whaitiri, S. L. Filipo, Huia Publishers, Wellington, NZ.

14 *Gadje-ness* is a form of white supremacy: the one inscribed in Gypsy everyday life through history; it permeates knowledge production. For a discussion, see the post by Margareta Matache, Instructor, Harvard University, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights (2016), 'The Legacy of Gypsy Studies in Modern Romani Scholarship', *Huffington Post's Contributor Platform,* October 11.

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18 Dunajeva, Jekatyerina, Kóczé, Angéla and Cemlyn, Sarah (2015), 'LGBTQIA, Feminism and Romani Studies', *Roma Rights: Journal of the European Roma Right Center*, N° 2, p. 76.

19 Sáenz, Charlotte Maria (2017), 'Other Worlds, Women Up in Arms: Zapatista and Rojava Kurds Embrace a New Gender Politics' www.huffingtonpost.com/beverly-bell/women-up-in-arms-zapatist_b_6891494.html; http://dilar91.blogspot.in/2015/04/feminism-and-kurdish-freedom-movement.html; Corradi, Laura (2016), 'Speciale Jin Jiyan Azadì – Dove le donne vivono libere. L'esperienza femminista delle donne curde nella Federazione Rojava', *Leggendaria*, N° 116 (maggio), pp. 43–56. Available from: https://bodypolitics.noblogs.org/files/2015/08/Speciale-Jin-Jiyan-Azad%C3%AC-femminismo-curdo.pdf; http://uikionlus.com/jinealogialanuovascienzacheliberaledonne/

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8 Conclusion

Gypsy springs, feminisms, and alliances

It is only through recognizing our privilege,
whether it be white privilege,
male privilege,
class privilege,
light skinned privilege,
or heterosexual privilege,
that we can challenge hierarchical relationships.
It is essential (. . .) *male activists acknowledge*
their male privilege as a first step
to challenging patriarchy.

(Alexandra Oprea, 2004, p. 39)

In this work, I discussed the contribution of Gypsy feminism by highlighting some of the ideas, projects, forms of agency, experiences, and knowledge produced in the specific margin of *Gypsyhood*, where new epistemological perspectives take birth at the crossroads of race, gender, class, age, sexuality, status, religion, different abilities, and geographical locations. Gypsy feminism is relevant for inclusive reflections upon social theories, action-research methodologies, anti-racist politics, and community alliances.

As its name suggests, one of the early publications involving Romani women in Europe[1] shows how the multiple discriminations faced can be represented in terms of a 'Fourth World,' situated in multiple locations and surviving in the interstices of western societies.[2] I think this is a suggestive way to describe the invisible continent most Gypsy women inhabit, seemingly remote and unknown, yet present everywhere.

Ethnic and non-ethnic protagonism in various communities has produced different configurations of political agency and gender activism, in rapidly changing situations, with a certain degree of variance from place to place. Within the framework of this social renaissance amongst Roma, Sinti, and Travellers, the emergence of Gypsy feminism is a stimulating self-reflective process within communities that helps to build bridges to the outside world. Both processes are crucial at this time, as communities come under scrutiny.

In fact, there are at least three reasons why Gypsy feminist action is important today. The first is growing anti-Gypsyism and racist attacks. Sometimes media attention denotes a benign preoccupation about 'vulnerable' settlements, but journalists are often all too ready to pick on 'backward' traditions and to use the occurrence of gender-based violence as an opportunity to spectacularize an event and represent males as brutal, thereby criminalizing a whole community. In this regard, Gypsy feminism is useful in two ways. It keeps the wheel of change moving in the direction of enhancing respect for differences and of empowerment and social cohesion in communities; and it facilitates appropriate communication around gender issues with the outside world.

The second reason that Gypsy feminism is pivotal regards the cultural awareness of the complexity of processes at the basis of identity formation, accompanied by a different consideration for works of art and music, memories, and language, even despite the danger that such cultural products become commodified. Here again, given the gendered construction of working practices, ethnic signs, and social identities, Gypsy feminists can be helpful in offering tools for self-reflection and participative practices, making clear identities are not for sale.

The third reason that Gypsy feminism is essential lies in the fact that no community can overcome oppression while maintaining forms of internal subjugation. The contribution of women's intelligence and abilities in social life and collective decision-making processes, as well as in families, is a vital resource for the full blooming of a Gypsy Spring. The same can be said for inclusive practices regarding those who are perceived as 'diverse.' The struggle for social inclusion should not be spoiled by marginalizing attitudes inside communities. Queer Gypsies do not deserve exclusion nor humiliation, but to be accepted as components of kinship and peer groups.

Gypsy feminism offers rich perspectives in terms of intersectionality to all those interested in defeating social inequalities.[3] It is also inspirational in terms of *coalition building*, because of the specific qualities of the resilience developed in different European countries and the transnationalism that Romani, Sinti, and Traveller women embody. Such perspectives are important in any political discourse about overcoming the state, as well as in the dialogue between ethnic and non-ethnic feminisms, in the 'south of the world' (Connell 2007) as well as elsewhere. Gypsy feminism transcends borders and challenges western geographical assumptions and Eurocentric attributions from a 'Fourth World' *shifting standpoint*. It represents a fresh perspective with ancient roots.

The romantic representations of Roma and Gypsy people as 'nomadic tribes of Europe' may not fully disappear, but today it is at least interwoven with new local and global dimensions that the communities have come to embody – creatively 'synthesized' over many years throughout the Diaspora by resisting ancient persecutions and current inequalities. Gypsy feminism is crucial to the development of such a course of action, and it is generally helpful as an ethical force, recalling essential values to western democracies,

which are tempted by authoritarian involutions and self-absorbed policies. Gypsy feminism opens gender-based alliances while offering relevant input to the construction of the interethnic societies of the future. No solution that does not positively address the situation of Gypsies in a participatory and decolonizing way, with self-governed communities, can be proposed in Europe. For such a strategic turnaround, the power of women serves as a fundamental energy.

Gypsy feminism is situated at the material and symbolic margins of the Euro-Atlantic center. Since the *locus* is part of theory construction, place matters in more than one way.[4] The positionality of social actors and specific situations mirrors indigenous philosophy, beliefs, and principles. Many similarities can be traced between the margins physically inhabited by the European Gypsies, and other margins lived by disadvantaged people in *bidonville*, shantytowns, refugee camps, and temporary migrant settlements in border regions. A comparison of Gypsy camps in Europe with Adivasi and Dalit settlements in India, and with Native reservations in North America, may seem incongruous, yet I have found analogs in the types of marginalization, both economic and political – similar patterns of social segregation, prejudice, and stereotyping.

Research and studies, at times still carried out with a *blame-the-victim* attitude,[5] show results that are comparable in terms of school dropout, high incarceration rate, and alcohol abuse.[6] One can come across similar physical pathologies due to poor nutrition, such as diabetes and obesity, which should be correlated to poverty, anxiety, and social discomfort rather than 'ethnicity' or an abstract individual 'free choice.' Degenerative illnesses are also common due to environmental exposure to pollutants near communities. Like Indian reservations, areas close to Gypsy camps are often chosen by politicians seeking sites for waste disposal and other risky business. Since they are considered expendable, both Natives and Gypsies are targets of environmental racism.[7] Both communities often suffer from what Bob Bullard called 'the donut syndrome,' i.e., being surrounded by different types of health hazards.[8] At the psychosocial level, I found similarities in *internalized forms of oppression*, which often speak the language of self-hatred and violence toward people of the same group. As Angela Davis used to say, internalized oppression is when members of an oppressed group believe the stereotypes created about them, and as a consequence start using the behavior and the arguments of the oppressors toward other members of the group.

Recognition and respect for all differences, including age, disability, sexuality, and gender identity, are vital for a full community resilience. Heteronormativity is one of the urgent issues deserving deconstructive attention in the Gypsy and Romani feminist scholar/activist agenda. As Jovanovic and Daroczi wrote,

> If we fight for equality but suppress voices within, we praise nothing but hypocrisy and leave so many voices unheard. Therefore, the struggle for Romani rights must be a struggle for and with all Roma.[9]

Interestingly, in the Gypsy context emancipationist gender activism and feminist liberation perspective both became visible in radical versions, mostly addressing intersectionality. This may be taken as a positive sign of unified intent, overcoming any ideologically dichotomous approach. One of the reasons for this may be related to the fact that gender and race are deeply intertwined in Gypsy women's experience.

As Indian feminist theoreticians, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty[10] and Guruminder Bambhra,[11] have suggested in different ways, the cooptation of gender and LGBTQIA categories within the paradigm of western representative democracy is an ongoing process. If gender and queer theories are not combined with post-colonial viewpoints a concrete risk remains.[12] Therefore, decolonizing theory and praxis, critique and activism, can be an antidote to political neutralization and cultural assimilation.

Theory in many ways reflects the material conditions in which it germinates. The hidden qualities of the Gypsies' 'traveling' thoughts are deeply rooted in the awareness of impermanence; the wind of change as opportunity, the ability to admit the downfall, start again and accept the change. Differently from the political experience already brought by migrant women into the white feminist agenda, different from place to place, and different from other urban feminist, nomads, and precarious contemporary identities,[13] Gypsy feminists have a distinctive background of know-how.

Their ways of understanding the world and reproducing social practices have been shaped throughout centuries of familiarity with various dominant cultures of Europe and other regions. Countless forms of oppression and fierce combination of resistance and adaptation have generated a very special and multifaceted *located knowledge* amongst Gypsies, characterized by an extraordinary capacity for verbal and non-verbal communication, for encountering novelty, and for transforming and being transformed. Coming into contact with different forms of subalternity and subjection has allowed Gypsy women to generate complex identities and multiple capacities of subversion.[14]

Nirmal Puwar has examined how women of ethnic minorities enter the white male contexts and the opposition they face therein, highlighting how 'some bodies have the right to belong to certain locations while others are marked out as trespassers.' This is particularly true for migrants and Gypsies, especially women, whose bodies are constantly perceived to be 'out of place.' By semiotically flipping over the tyranny of rank, as Puwar suggests, we can change the meaning and the status of such 'space invaders' from undesired intruders to welcomed rescuers – salvagers who can release European segregated societies from the bondages of ignorance, racism, and hatred.[15]

Concepts such as 'integration' and 'inclusion' require some added reflection by scholars and activists, because they signify that some people are being *let in* by others, who have dominion over the place. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres pointed out, 'The opposite of exclusion, in contexts structured by coloniality is not inclusion, but decolonization. Inclusion, in these contexts, is just another form of coloniality.'[16]

Decolonization is a complex process that implies the deconstruction of any despotic signifier and a *semiotic inversion*, the overturning of its meaning – a key passage for dismantling racist and hetero-sexist stereotypes, for the disarticulation of unconscious processes of self-inferiorization. Cultural maneuvers of re-reading and re-signification – as black feminists, Indian feminists, indigenous feminists have produced[17] – seems to be a useful step for a collective enhancing of political agency, with the trans-cultural Gypsy communities of Europe and beyond serving as protagonists today. At this crucial juncture, the role of Gypsy feminists is a strategic one for ensuring that hegemonic white culture is overcome, along with its hetero-patriarchal legacy. These need to be 'disassembled' in radical antagonism with the dominant paradigm of neoliberalism, just as the long wave of a Gypsy Spring is bringing social hope, transformative energies, and new alliances to all communities.

There are the times in which any and every obstacle to broad coalitions must be removed. As Indian writer and activist Arundhati Roy inspiringly affirms, the worst crime we can commit in this era is that of being ineffective in our struggle for justice and freedom. The most effective politics today show the way to building alliances. Therefore, accepting the common differences between various ethnic and non-ethnic groups, with diverse forms of agency, is a vital challenge. Opening a productive dialogue with social movements such as feminism and anti-racism, environmental justice activism and the agency of Queer people, means to expand political horizons and obtain larger recognition for the agendas and leadership of Roma, Sinti, Gypsy, and Traveller.

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